Jawdat Sa'eed Answers Twelve Questions Posed by the Journal "Current Islamic Issues"

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The Questions:

Esteemed Sheikh, Jawdat Sa'eed, may Allah preserve him,
Peace be to you,

Our journal, "Current Islamic Issues", proposes to devote its next issue to current Arabic thought, introducing some of the most salient trends and leading figures of today's Arabic cultural scene. As you are one of the distinguished cultural Arab figures, we would be grateful if you answered the following questions:

1. What are some of the major stages in your intellectual progress?
2. What are the constituent elements, and main thinkers, that mainly contributed to your intellectual experience?
3. What are the main features of your project "The laws of changing individuals and societies?" Do you consider that project an off-shoot of Malek Bennabi's project, "Crises of Civilizations?"
4. In your writings, you stress that there are two sources of knowledge: the Qur'an, and human history – that a man who ignores human history cannot think properly. So how would you place human history in relation to the Qur'an? And how can world history be so indispensable in approaching the Qur'an?
5. Jawdat Sa'eed is a great promoter of the repudiation of violence. He goes so far as to call for the discarding of the sword and all weaponry; he likens the purchase of arms to the purchase of idols. His doctrine of the 'Way of Adam's Son' is inseparable from Jawdat Sa'eed's name, since that way was put forth in the title of his first book. So the question would naturally arise: Is Jawdat Sa'eed upholding the annulment of 'jihad', an established Islamic obligation, even when all its conditions are met? Is he calling for disobeying Allah's command, "Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power," (the Qur'an, 8:60)? Is it right in his point of view that we be passive spectators while the Zionist enemy is amassing its huge arsenal? Is he calling for terminating the resistance movements in the face of destructive powers?
6. Jawdat Sa'eed confers on Muhammad Iqbal's thought such a distinguished status. So what is so original about Iqbal? In what way has he laid the bases for a new system? What is his impact on current Arab thought?
7. Globalization seems to be a new mask worn by the Western civilization. So how can we guard our cultural identity? How can we preserve our independent character so that we do not get dissolved in this new call to globalization?
8. One main tenet in your writings is a call to free ourselves of father veneration, raising our ancestors above their human place and accepting their way as

infallible. You assert that this idealization of ancestors blocks the way to any new approach to things. The question here is: are you calling to dissociation with the heritage of the past? If so, do you not agree that any advance in dissociation with the past is illusive, without any roots?

9. Do you agree with the now prevalent assumption that the Muslim mind is in a crisis? If that is so, how extensive is this phenomenon, and what are its manifestations? How can we overcome this crisis?
10. What is your reading of the present Arab cultural scene? What books or projects do you rate as interesting and not just repetitive?
11. Professor Muhammad Arkoun insists that there is a need for a fresh theology for approaching Islam and religion in general, and emphasizes that this is still hardly touched upon. Arkoun mocks those who cite the Qur'an in the course of a debate – according to him, any such attempt would stir all the problems of moving from a mythical to a scientific age. So how would you rate this stance of Arkoun's?
12. What do you think of the modern trends concerning sacred texts [the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions], according to which any attempt to arrive at truth through examining a text must bring up all the multiplicity of readings: in the sense that no general truth can really be gleaned from a text; that even the attempts at legislation on the basis of texts, and through analyzing texts, is bound to be elusive and illusive, no matter how ardently its adherents claim to be sincere and objective. Is not such position tantamount to assuming that the truth of the sacred text itself is relative, or even nonexistent?

Abdul-Jabbar al-Rifa'ee,
Editor-in-chief, *Current Islamic Issues*

Jawdat Sa'eed's Answers

Sent in June of the same year, 1998

Thank you, Mr. Abdul-Jabbar al-Rif'ee,
Editor-in-chief, *Current Islamic Issues*

[The following two notes might be helpful to the reader. The first is to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the above journal is Iranian, and hence the many references to Iranian affairs in Mr. Sa'eed's answers. The other note is that those who know Mr. Sa'eed will not be surprised at his very unconventional way of replying. For instance, as he feels in the course of his answer to Question One that he has said enough about Question Two, he skips that question.] Here are now his answers:

Thank you for your questions: the implication of your letter is that I am a pillar of the current Arabic intellectual scene, an honor that I do not merit. But let me go to your questions.

Q. 1: What are some of the major stages in your intellectual progress?

A. 1: Let me admit at the outset that you succeed in what many have failed to do, by drawing from me answers to your questions. The reason you succeed is the perceptiveness with which you enter my world; you really touch on the finer

details of that world. The points you raise do really reveal a mind that can appreciate the issues that keep preoccupying my mind. Thank you for all that.

Now you ask me about the major stages in my intellectual progress. It is an important and critical question, but can I do justice to it? Can one ever remember the circumstances that directed his intellectual growth? I don't think so. Nevertheless, the attempt is worthwhile; one in fact should try to trace such influences. Let me begin with this incident: I once returned home when I was in the second grade, having learned at school how to pray, and what to say in the final sitting position. The textbook we used at school mentioned two versions of the 'testifying supplication' for that position, one reported by Ibn Abbas, a companion of the Prophet's, peace be upon him, and the other reported by Ibn Mas'ud, another companion. Feeling puzzled why two different versions existed, I asked my mother on arriving home what was behind this difference. So she peered long at the comment on the two supplications and then said, pointing out one of them: "This is the right version which you should learn, for it is the one chosen by the chief of jurists, Abu Hanifah [the founder of one of the four schools of Islamic law, *madhab* in Arabic]; as for the other, it is for the followers of the Shafiite *madhhab*'." She did not feel the need for any further explanation. As for me, I did not dare to follow the matter up with my teacher or my father: like other children, I dared to ask my mother what I did not dare to ask a teacher or a father; but even with her, I felt too shy to persist any further. But it did occur to me then that if a child happened to be of the Shafiite *madhab*, and had returned home and asked his mother, she would say: "We are followers of the Great Imam, al-Shafii," and would have pointed out the other version as the more authentic one.

Now I can see that that elementary and childish inquiry is still the philosophical stumbling block which is not yet satisfied by men. The difference of course is that I went on later to inquire what should be one's reference in determining not only the Hanafite from the Shafi'ite *madhab*; nor even the Sunni from the Shiite position; but what should be one's reference in determining whether the believers or non-believers were nearer the truth. I find that this also relates to your fourth question, in which you ask: How would you place human history in relation to the Qur'an? And how can world history be so indispensable in approaching the Qur'an?

It is really hard work to bring to the reader's notice all the wilderness I had to trudge through until I came to perceive that history should be recognized as a source of knowledge. It took me more than half a century; I was all the time grappling with the question: How do I know that I know what I know? It was like a worshipper who seeks the right direction of '*qibla*, or Mecca' to direct his face to while performing his prayer. How to know that there is a truth to seek, that life is not without a North Pole. Now I realize that the ignorant person who says: Thank God that we were born into the true religion; praise be to God that we were not born in the wrong place – that this poor soul is not in much worse position than the proud philosophers in the past and present who feel that their philosophy has brought them face to face with nihilism and nothingness. That man is controlled by his culture is true, and the Prophet, peace be upon him says: "Every human is born ready to follow the straight path. It is his parents who make of him a Christian, a Jew, a Magian, or whatsoever." One's environment is very often a

source of knowledge to him; one's family and ancestors are very often his reference for choosing his creed, and this way is condemned in the Qur'an. An individual's social milieu or his ancestors may not be his criterion for knowing right from wrong in the Qur'an. And again I feel that this brings up your eighth question, in which you say: Are you calling to dissociation with the heritage of the past?

Does not this remind you of a line of Persian poetry cited by the previous Iranian president Khatami, which says: "Well, can you, when you bask in the soft breeze, sense the darkness and bewilderment we go through!" I say this in view of the difficulty I went through from one level to the next. As for the level I reached, though I cannot claim I have gone beyond, is breaking free from the control of the fathers. Let met be clear about the authority of ancestors: to hold them up as an intellectual reference is a mistake; but it is another mistake to ignore them. They are human beings, not less and not more; as we recite in the Qur'an: "You are humans, just like the humans He has created;" (5:18). I wish someone would write a whole book focused on this verse, "You are humans, just like the humans He has created;" though I have little hope of myself writing such a book, in the way I have written several books focused on Qur'anic verses. The doubt about following fathers comes from the fact that without the fathers we are nothing. You are quite right when you say: do you not agree that any advance in dissociation with the past is illusive and without any roots? When one is not confined to what he has received from the fathers, he may pick up or devise an idea that is quite revolutionary. I say this here because I remember what Malek Bennabi once wrote, I think in a footnote on his book, *The Birth of A Community*: History is change; it is development. That is so because a time that passes without bringing forth change and development is a dead time. Then he cited the example of ants and bees, that those species have had no change in millions of years, so that if you eliminate a million years of their history, the latter part can just connect to the earlier part with no loss detected. This is not so in the development of the human species.

Man is a process, for Allah adds to creation as He pleases [ref. to the Qur'an, 30:1]; and He creates things of which we are not aware. How dense is the darkness in which we live, and how heavy the shackles we bear! According to the Qur'an, Allah sends His prophets so that He releases men from their heavy burden, and from the yokes that are upon them [7:157]. But let me move on to another juncture in my progress: One day, late in the nineteen forties, and I was at that time a student at al-Azhar University, it occurred to my mind that our instructors taught us that we were drawing close to the end of the world, that no day but would be worse than the previous day. And so I reasoned, if so, if the faith we believed in was fated to be deteriorating day by day, why should one dedicate himself to serving such a failed doctrine? Indeed, had not man's need for religion been so deep, he would have given up all faith; but it so happens that no matter how badly people disfigure religion, men's need remains deeper than any distortions: man knows deep in his heart that this world is not there for no reason. Man knows deep at heart that truth is to be fulfilled, but because for many of us no justice seems to be realized in this world, some wait to see it realized on the Day of Judgment.

But where, I went on to think, did this idea, that the world was coming to a near end, originate? Did the Qur'an teach this? So I scanned the Qur'an to check, but I found nothing of that. Instead, I saw in the Qur'an, "Anyone who has done an atom's weight of good shall see it;" (99:7) "We will, without doubt, help Our apostles and those who believe, both in this world's life and on the Day when the witnesses stand forth;" (40: 51) "If any think that God will not help him in this world and the Hereafter, let him stretch out a rope to the ceiling, and cut himself off;" (22:15) and I found, "God has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety, grant them in the land, inheritance of power;" (24:55). All the verses of the Qur'an, however, were not enough. When a society ceases to develop and grow, when it is no longer in a 'process', it will be despondent: there will settle in it the idea of the time coming to an end. Well, Abdul-Jabbar, I do not have the brilliant style that matches the issues I am handling. Hence, I use many words to express so little; and it is not enough that questions are intriguing, and that I try to satisfy you, but I must be fair to the reader and help him.

The Muslim World has strayed into the wilderness long enough. It is taking too long to walk out of it: people like you and me we feel that the Muslim World is too slow to awaken; although for those who relish watching our sleep, they feel that the Muslim World is moving too fast towards gaining comprehension. Now to get back to the point of ancestors, without the ancestors' experiences we have got to return to the cave or the forest. At that time man only gathered or hunted his food, before agriculture. It was what we have inherited from the ancestors that put us where we are. Therefore, the right attitude to the ancestors is that expressed in this verse from the Qur'an, "Such are they from whom We shall accept the best of their deeds and pass by their ill deeds;" (46:16). But we are still unable to go beyond our fathers, and I may only turn to God, to pray: "O, Lord! Gant us light! Enable us to see things for what they are, and not as our forefathers saw them!" For fourteen centuries things have, in the hands of our ancestors, gone down and down, and they have walked from one defeat to the next, and each defeat was worse than the previous one. Let me be clear here, that I have as much respect as any other Muslim does: They did their part; they did not have all the history we have to shed light on our way. They should be forgiven their shortcomings, but we are not justified in not getting rid of the negative aspects of our life; we are not justified in failing to comprehend how God keeps expanding creation, for God 'adds to creation as He pleases,' (the Qur'an, 35:1). It is now the others who fulfill this expansion of creation, and it is God's will that any people who endeavor, should reap the fruit of their effort, as the Qur'an says: "Such days of varying fortunes We give to men and men by turns." (3:140) The text, as we use it, works to block our understanding of things in the world and analyzing history: while the right approach is to view history and the revealed text as inseparable partners, for no offspring may be begotten without both parties doing their part.

We need to relate this issue of past generations to another point. Writing, the art of transmitting concepts and experience with symbols, is a new technology in the life of mankind. It is a decisive advance of man over all the other living beings. All other species possess all their abilities and bear their behaviors within their genes; but it is not so in the case of man: when he is born, a human being does not possess within his genes all his behaviors, nor is his future encoded there. A child

is born knowing nothing, and from the moment it is born, it begins to learn things about how to behave in life. It is true what the ancients called man, 'a talking animal'; man transmits experience with words. Although we have no way of specifying the exact time when man started to talk, we do have exact knowledge about when man started to read and write; it is so because the written material, in contrast with spoken words, are inscribed on stone, on skin, or on paper; and we have such inscribed texts dating five thousand years back. We need to think of the written text as a great thing, as a sacred achievement, for it is the technique which has helped man to preserve his experience. Before writing, mankind's experience used to vanish and perish – the human brain dies with the death of man, and any experience that it may have acquired is bound to die with its death. For eons of time, man lived in an oral period, and God did not reveal any of His books until man was able to read and write. It is perhaps a reminder of this that the last prophet, Muhammad, was illiterate.

Having a book is a stage beyond that of just assigning names to things around man. Therefore, God does not say about Adam that He had revealed a book to him; he just says, 'And He taught Adam the names 'and nature' of all things;' (2:31) Man was enabled to utter words, and give vocal symbols to concepts; his ability to give names to things indicates his gaining knowledge of things, and of whatever fresh knowledge is revealed to his mind, physical or moral. In this way we understand, 'And He taught Adam the names 'and nature' of all things;' (2:31) not that God taught Adam all the languages of the world. Later, man learned how to inscribe symbols on paper, and was able to write the Qur'an. It was in the Qur'an, too, that the first revealed word, "Read," (96:1) was connected with this technique, the ability to write: the word 'read', which was the first word to be revealed to Prophet Muhammad, refers to this ability to encode words into graphic symbols, and then to decipher the same symbols when reading a text. A symbol is valuable in that it has no independent sense: it is we human beings who relate the sense to the referent by bearing a sense in our mind, and being aware that a specific word refers to something in the world.

This brings us to consider texts: A text is of no value except to the extent it is related to real things; at the same time, what we experience in the real world gets lost unless and until it is recorded in a text, and that shows how essential a text is in the life of man. Texts are invaluable in the life of men; more than that, several techniques are being discovered and applied to give permanence to uttered words, not only words but visual representations of the person who utters the words. It is very laboriously and slowly that we begin to understand the relationship between a text and the real world, or the reference and the referent. This is so vital that Allah uses the real world to testify to the authenticity of His Scripture. In this verse, "We will show them Our Signs in the regions of the earth and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the truth;" (41:53) it is shown that when one goes along in the light of both the text and the actual facts of the world, he will never be deluded. A revealing incident here is that men were disputing and even fighting incessantly about the nature of the sun and earth, about which orbited which; and the revealed text in their hands did not help in putting an end to that disputation. What actually brought that dispute to an end was when men turned their look upwards and saw for themselves how the earth orbited the sun. By exploring God's signs in the world, and exploring the nervous

system, the reservoir which stores all the experiences, we can handle the revealed text properly. Unless we perceive and acknowledge that relation between the revealed words (the text), and the reality, (which is discussed in the text), unless we take both, we will go one straying in the wilderness and condemning each other.

Muhammad Abduh had a decisive effect on my progress. So had Muhammad Assad (in his book, *Islam at Crossroads*.) I began to see that one may come upon new solutions for problems, all problems. What mainly drove me to believe in this was looking again at this verse of the Qur'an: "And He subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth;" (45:13) I began to see that the world was there to do our bidding; and when the world does not obey our command, then it is not the world's fault; it is rather ours. I must assert here that my progress was slow; it took ideas such a long time to develop. At the same time I felt that there were moments of insight. About the time I graduated from al-Azhar University, in the mid-fifties of the twentieth century, I was all ears and eyes; always on the alert to hear and see new things, and to analyze what I saw and heard. It was about that time that I came upon a book by Malek Bennabi, *Conditions of Revival*, and it was such a major juncture in my intellectual progress. I did not understand it well the first time, but I did sense that there was here an unusual approach to things, a singular way of analyzing things. And so I read and read: later I pondered over every word of every book by Malek Bennabi. One of his books, *The Afroasian Idea*, I read maybe more than thirty times. I would reflect on ideas and bring them together, to analyze and compare. The greatest idea in Malek Bennabi is that of colonisibility, a people's proneness to be victims of imperialism. It is a vital concept, and it is our responsibility to develop the idea and carry it beyond where Bennabi left it. This idea really echoes the Qur'anic verse: "Whatever evil befalls you is from your own soul;" (4:79) What Bennabi was saying was very different from what we used to hear from al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, and even Iqbal. It was such a jolt to me when he refrained from blaming the enemies, the colonizer, the imperialist, the crusader, the Zionist, the freemason, and all the other foes. No other speaker, Islamist or secularist, but charged the others and blamed them for what befell us. In contrast, the speakers would very little and in such a low voice speak, if they spoke at all, of our faults and mistakes, the factors that enabled others to manipulate us. It was such a giant step to turn our attention to our own responsibility. It was also another surprise when he said that whenever Muslims meet in conferences they would put forth the Palestinian problem as being the Muslim World's prime problem, and that, as Malek Bennabi declared, was a mistake – our real malaise was colonisibility, and our backwardness; Palestine, Cashmere, Eritrea, etc. were no more than symptoms of the disease. And it was no little shock when he said: Colonisibility hit us long before the colonizer ever thought of colonizing us. It came to take shape not in Paris, London, Washington or Moscow, but it took shape under the domes of mosques in the Muslim World, in Bukhara, Samarqand, Delhi, Teheran, Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, and Kairawan, along the Tangier – Jakarta axis. I felt the value of the curve he drew of the progress of the Muslim culture, starting with the Angel's call to the Prophet, at Hira Cave, a first phase which came to an end at Siffeen Battle; a second phase which came to an end with Ibn Khaldoun; and then a descending phase which resulted in the retrogression and colonization. It was such an eye-opener to me when he said: A person who

speaks now without being conscious of what additions were brought forth to human knowledge in the twentieth century must be the object of derision and mockery. Do you see, Abdul-Jabbar, how slow we are to come to understand things? We not only are averse to analyzing the factors of our backwardness, but we camouflage those factors with the best appearance, and we are very often prepared to die in defending them rather than change.

Another juncture is that of Muhammad Arkoun. Arkoun has the distinction of having freed himself of that tendency, prevalent in the Muslim World, to take things to be either faultless or worthless, where, as Malek Bennabi explains, things can be too easily shifted from one to the other category: how easily would a freedom-fighter be in a minute stigmatized as a traitor, or a believer as a heretic or apostate.

My experience with Iqbal was very unlike that with Malek Bennabi, for Iqbal was a *sufi* (mystic) poet, who soared in the sky, debating with men, jinn, satans, imperialism and Redwan, Paradise's guard. Iqbal showed great insight in comprehending the truth, and he knew it. He said: My eyes can perceive the pulse of the stars/and the flow of the blood in the moon's vessels. He knew much about the world and about man, far above other Muslims. He said, in his poetic style: Man is a limb of God's will. It was Iqbal who awakened us to the fact that though the Qur'an and Islam emerged before the age of science, it was the Qur'an which heralded the age of science. It was Iqbal, too, who alerted us to the importance of the facts of the real world and human experience (the signs in Qur'anic diction): in his words, the Qur'an takes the observable world, and man's inner world, as sources of knowledge. He pointed this out through a verse from the Qur'an which states: "We will show them Our Signs in the regions of the earth and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the truth;" (41:53). He shed on this verse a light that shines more and more with the passage of time. Iqbal acknowledged that it was Jalal al-Deen al-Rumi who transformed him, from being an ordinary person into a new being. I also learned something else from the story he recounts about al-Rumi, who searched and searched for a certain man who inspired him, Shams al-Deen al-Tabreezee; but after his long search he realized that the inspiration that he sought was inside his soul.

It was Iqbal, too, who appreciated the significance of the 'seal of prophethood', the fact that Muhammad, peace be upon him, was the last apostle of Allah's. I think we do not yet appreciate the full significance of this fact; but history will reveal its full weight. We do say that Muhammad, peace be upon him, is the seal (last) of prophets, but how important is this fact? Now, the whole phenomenon of prophethood, from Noah until Muhammad, lasted just less than five thousand years; so how will the situation of mankind be after a million years? Iqbal notes in this connection: It was right that the prophethood should come to an end, because the signs (facts) of the world and the signs in our own souls have become a source of learning the truth.

It was Iqbal who helped me know right from wrong when considering that old question about the Hanafite and Shafiite *madhabs*, schools of Islamic law. He said: the way to knowing the truth about doctrines, philosophies, religions, and cultures, is to observe the kind of man which any of these doctrines, etc. produces.

Iqbal was physiologically short-sighted, but he proved to have such a far-reaching intellect when he helped me solve the problem of *shari'ah*, God's law – it was such a giant idea when he said: Allah's *shari'ah* is realized when justice is realized; whatever comes closer to justice is closer to Allah's *shari'ah*. As for the details of the law, they will vary depending on the age, the objective always being the realization of justice and beautiful dealings. I am not saying that there are no other first rate thinkers, but I'm saying that the above are the greatest thinkers I knew of. The common factor in all these thinkers is their giving first place to man and appreciating man. But Oh! In what darkness we grope, when we kill each other! Where is the light! Where is the paradigm, as Heidegger says?

So far, I think I have somehow attended to your first two questions, 1, the intellectual junctures, and 2, the intellectual elements. I was once a follower of the 'salafi' trend (following the example of the first generations of Islam), then I drew my inspiration from al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, and then it was Iqbal. Then I discovered Muhammad Arkoun, and that was a more demanding stage than any other, for when you are dealing with the West, it is not easy to see your way, and to detect the pitfalls. But I drew from Iqbal some strength. He used to say: Your civilization will keep tumbling and slipping, for a nest that is built on a fragile bough will not stay long; your fire does not dazzle my eyes, for I have chosen to follow Abraham's faith. Can we ever when dealing with the West adhere to the rule of "Such are they from whom We shall accept the best of their deeds and pass by their ill deeds;" (the Qur'an, 46:16)? Why should some of us see nothing of the West but its worst delusions and aberrations, while others see nothing but the opposite? It is right to say here that it is not only the means of transportation that the Westerners have invented, but they have invented a way of transferring rule without spilling blood: this latter innovation is far more worthy than the means of transportation. And while we are anxious to buy and buy vehicles (buy rather than manufacture), we are not at all anxious to learn the transfer in politics and rule, the way rule can be transferred from person to person without spilling blood: not many of us believe in the power of the idea, that people can be persuaded rather than coerced; neither the secularist nor the pious believe in this. Though in the Western democracy the transfer of rule is tarnished by some deception and fraud to manipulate the voters, it is still not gained through intimidating people with the whip and iron and fire. Democracy is quite a new thing in the world, despite all the elementary forms that had appeared at various times in the past. Muslims had a certain form of free opinion at the time of the Upright Caliphs, and when they lost that Muslims felt in a vague way that something right was slipping away, and therefore some said, when Mu'awiyah was planning to have his son forced on people as ruler after him: "What are trying to do? Are you adopting the method of the czars, who when a czar dies, he is succeeded by a czar!" Muslims did feel that something great was being wasted, thought they did not quite understand the proper way. But mankind went beyond that, for as the Qur'an teaches us, and as I quoted above, God adds to creation as He pleases, and so how freedom and representation should be translated into an applied reality was developed and elaborated. Things do change. Modernity appeared in people's view of the universe, for at one time, and for so many centuries, men asserted that the sun orbited the earth, and when some declared that it was the other way round, that we were not at the center of the universe, many

people were extremely alarmed and outraged: they felt something terrible would happen if man, and man's earth, were not at the center of the universe. Indeed, some people were prepared to die, or to send others to death, to keep the old idea intact. But the change was taking place in astronomy, and modernity was starting to take root, and our view of the universe was changing. Other things were happening, the steam engine, the combustion engine. Instead of the horse, the camel and the donkey, new means of transportation were introduced that the older generations had not dreamed of. The telescope enabled people to see what they never dreamed of seeing before; on the other hand the microscope showed people tiny particles that were never seen before: germs were seen that enabled men to discover the causes of epidemics; in this way cures for many diseases were discovered. And ever so much more sophistication is taking place. All started from Copernicus, and people can comprehend this; but the other revolution, that in the social, political, and human spheres is not yet appreciated.

From observing history, one can notice a certain very curious phenomenon. In the past, kings seemed to be of huge stature, apparently there to stay for ever; and if a king was eliminated by assassination, then it was only his person who was eliminated. His same prestige was transferred to his successor. Also, the public in the past were taken to be an ignorant, worthless, a homogeneous mass; with no claim to any part at all in public affairs, apart from prostrating themselves before their monarch. And then, the astronomical revolution was followed by a social revolution, when kings dwindled and dwindled, until they are in the developed societies no more than relics from the past, physically preserved, but without any authority whatsoever. Power was being transferred to the people, very slowly, but very surely. This really is a move towards modernity, social modernity. Man is growing in stature; by which we mean that man's consciousness is growing, the more so as he learns more about history. One can recall the time when men offered human sacrifices, and how, when Abraham appeared, a stop was put to this offering of human sacrifices. It is right to see in the Islamic practices of offering an animal sacrifice during *al-Adha Bairam*, a declaration of the end of offering human sacrifices. It announces that humankind is developing and advancing. That with the advent of Islam a new epoch was arriving, and was being proclaimed in many ways. There is in the Qur'an the debate between Abraham and the tyrannical ruler, whom Abraham challenged to show any control over universe's laws (2:258.) That the unbeliever was nonplused is a reminder that the world is shocked when a new stage comes forth. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, announced during his 'farewell pilgrimage' the experience of Abraham, and he announced to all human beings: "You all descend from Adam, and Adam was created from dust. No Arab is to be favored over a non-Arab, no white is to be favored over a black – except in piety." He added: Do not regress into wild life, spilling each other's blood." He also exhorted his audience to be kind to women, who were [at that time] confined at homes and wholly controlled by men. It was a new epoch of equity and the elimination of privileges, announced at least in theory. But the scientific transformation was slow, so slow, to take place.

Am I straying away from the questions? Well, my justification is that the points are within the Islamic dilemma, and the human dilemma. I feel that the facts of the world are regaining to the texts their significance after they have been vitiated of

it. It is relevant here to assert that the message of all the prophets is one and the same. No matter how we brand Christianity or Judaism as polytheistic or chauvinistic, the essence of all the divine religions is one and the same: they all revolve on monotheism which, as long as it remains intact, all other sins may be forgiven; but if it is marred, no act of devotion is accepted. We may read about that in the Qur'an: "For We assuredly sent amongst every people an apostles with the command, 'Serve God and eschew *taghoot* [the trespasser beyond all limits, the tyrant]' " (16:36) So let's remember the one message which was conveyed by each and every apostle, 'Serve God and eschew the *taghhot*'. Now in all the comments and exegeses on the Qur'an, I have never seen any adequate explanation of the word '*taghoot*'. They merely render it as 'evil', 'Satan', or 'the idols'; while, if we do a little search about the derivatives of the word, for its root '*tagha*', we find the Qur'an uses the word differently from what the commentators have taken it to be. We find for instance that God directs Moses to go to Pharaoh with these words, 'Go thou to Pharaoh, for he has indeed *tagha* [i.e. transgressed beyond all bounds.]' (76:17;) and we find, "[Seest thou not how thy Lord dealt with …, and with …,] And with Pharaoh, lord of stakes? All these *taghau* [transgressed beyond bounds] in the land, and heaped therein mischief on mischief. Therefore did thy Lord pour on them a scourge of diverse penalties: For thy Lord is like a guardian on a watch-tower." (89:10-14) No tyrant is held up in the Qur'an as the prototype of transgression and tyranny more than Pharaoh; not any name – apart from that of Allah – is mentioned in the Qur'an more often than that of Moses, the man who stood in the face of Pharaoh; and that in the greatest civilization of the ancient world. The Qur'an lets Pharaoh utter all he feels about the attitudes and nuances of the feelings of the oppressors, all that is publicly and privately uttered by this category as represented by their foremost archetype is recorded in the Qur'an. Moses is equally the model for challenging the tyrant; he keeps reminding his people of all they need to do to rid themselves of the submissive state to the transgressor. It must be revealing that the story of Moses and Pharaoh has been repeated in the Qur'an more than any other story, with varying details and lengths. It has definitely been given less than justice of investigation and analysis.

It is to be noted that the issue of monotheism and polytheism does not focus on the divine aspect but on the attitude of individuals and communities: it is a human-social-political issue: it is concerned with putting right the relations among people – that God is One was not unknown to the Quraysh tribe which the Prophet, peace be on him, first addressed, exactly as now we say about God He is One. But still they rejected the message borne by the Messenger: the point of their dispute with the Messenger was that in that society some individuals were granted privileges not granted to the rest of society; some individuals were held to be above the law. The sort of community the Prophet, peace be upon him, was introducing, a society in which the law is applied to Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter, in the same way as to any other man or woman, that was an unheard of society. Theirs was the same as the societies in our own time: we just need to cite the Veto Right in the foremost of all the organizations of our world to see that societies not only keep silent when this great transgression is committed, but those who are not endowed the Veto Right crave it bitterly. It shows that polytheism is still true of our time at the highest level in the world; the transgressors are the biggest powers in the

world, and their transgression is endorsed by the smaller and smallest transgressors. Nobody stands up to denounce the Veto Right.

It is for the above reason that Iqbal used to say that monotheism was not the opposite of multiple gods, but the opposite of '*shirk*, i.e. taking some people to be above the law, not applying the law to some individuals.' When Pharaoh said: "I am your Lord, most high," (79:24), he meant that it was he, and no other person, who had the right to enact law, and to be himself exempt from the law. He said to his people, as the Qur'an reports: "I but point out to you that which I see myself, nor do I guide you but to the path of right;" (40:29); he said to his people: "No god do I know for you but myself!" (28:38); he said to Moses: "If thou dost put forward any god other than me, I will certainly put thee in prison!" (26:29) and he said to his magicians, when they declared their converting to the new faith: "Believe ye in him before I give you permission? Surely he is your leader, who has taught you sorcery! But soon shall ye know! Be sure I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and I will cause you all to die on the cross!" (26:49-50).These events of history should teach us laws, in the same way as the chemist observes and experiments and draws out laws. The events of history point out how man builds up and destroys, that man is equal to establishing intelligent life, and is prone to ruin it: that was true in the past, and it is true at present. It is man's responsibility to do right: "Truly he succeeds that purifies [his soul], and he fails that corrupts it!" (91:9-10). If Pharaoh's sorcerers' ropes and rods seemed on account of their magic to be in lively motion (20:66), there is similar magic now, when men now use the war-heads and missiles, assuming that they have control; they are indeed not better than Pharaoh's sorcerers. And we let ourselves be led into believing in the magic when we take those weapons to indicate that those who use them have control. Why do not we notice that all the atomic power of the former Soviet Union did not help in saving it from collapse? One lesson that we should have drawn is that as long as you give muscles rather than intellect your confidence, you are bound to fall, for you become a victim of your muscles.

The prophets did better when they taught humankind a more extraordinary and revolutionary way of change in human relationships, a way of conducting human, social and political affairs in the most economical way, indeed without any cost to any party. The prophets reversed the equation adopted by many quarters: instead of a relationship based on muscular power, and on the threat of killing the other, instead of bragging: "I give life and death;" (the Qur'an, 2:258), it is in the prophets' way giving life and not death; instead of a relationship based on killing and counter-killing, it is a relationship based on holding back from killing. It is a radically different way of viewing things; it reverses matters completely; it utterly transforms the situation. That is so because instead of man being slave to man, he becomes a slave to the Lord of men. That is why the Qur'an does not say: "Kill the *taghoot* (the transgressor, the oppressor, the despot)"; but it rather says: "Those who eschew the *taghoot* and fall not into its worship, and turn to God in repentance, for them is good news: so announce the good news to My Servants;" (39:17) and it says: "God is the Protector of those who have faith: from the depth of darkness He will lead them forth into light. Of those who reject faith the patrons are *taghoots*: from light they lead them forth into the depths of darkness;" (2:257).

Modernity first appeared in astronomy, and then it appeared in the social sphere. When someone started to write about 'Chosen Slavery', he meant that no one could enslave us without our consent; it meant that as long as we refused to be slaves no one could force slavery on us. And that is more true of great multitudes of people: no one can subject a great number of people to be enslaved without exercising some kind of magic or jugglery over them, exactly as the Pharaoh's magicians exercised it, when their ropes and rods seemed on account of their magic to be in lively motion (20:66). Do you not see how a myriad of people are threatened with death, and they believe it! A magic no better than Pharaoh's magicians'. It is our responsibility to help people have consciousness enough to be freed from magic, any magic, not just one form of it. Our present writings bind people further to our chosen slavery.

In view of ideas like the above I sometimes say that what the prophets taught, though it descended from heaven, has not yet reached the earth. What they taught was not killing people, and not killing the despot or the oppressor: it is rather to disobey the tyrant, if he commands you to kill; it is to hold back your hand in that case. Why has this point remained ignored and undiscussed; in the modern terminology, as used by Arkoun, it would be called unthought of, or even unthinkable. There was a time when it was impossible to think about an earth orbiting the sun: that was so according to the culture of a certain period, according to accepted concepts. Similarly, it is at this moment unthinkable that one refrains from killing if commanded to kill. How long will it take us to get out of our darkness? Bilal, Ammar, Sumayyah and Yaser, four companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, succeeded in getting out of obeying the oppressor and doing what he dictated; they simply held their hand back. And that is the real kernel of belief in the One God: to get out of being enslaved to the *taghoot*. That is why I say: instead of seeing the young Islamists being imprisoned or put to death or tortured for attempting to kill someone, I would prefer that they are tortured, put to death, or imprisoned because they have refused to kill. It is strange how we do not teach a Muslim youth not to kill Muslims! It is strange how we inspire him to kill the tyrant! How often in our history have we killed the tyrants, and the result has only been that their assassins turned themselves into tyrants. Will this simple fact be learned one day?

All the armies of the world teach their soldiers to act on what they are commanded and to do so without objection: it is the commanding authority which bears the responsibility for the command. This is man's law; but Allah's law, belief in the One God, does not allow you to obey anyone when their command is contrary to God's command. From the first sura (chapter) that was revealed to the Prophet we learn to disobey an unjust command: "Seest thou one who forbids a votary when he turns to pray? … Nay, heed him not: but bow down in adoration, and bring thyself the closer to God!" (96:9-19)

It has been heartening to hear recently how more than thirty senior officers in the Turkish army were expelled for their 'indiscipline': they dared to perform their prayers in their barracks in public. When you insist on doing your prayer in defiance of the *taghoot*, you will learn, and you will inspire others to learn, to disobey him when he commands you to kill Muslims. Others are waiting for you to lead the way, so do not let them down: be the first to disobey the tyrant.

Will we not learn when to disobey tyrants? They will go on commanding their soldiers to kill as long as they find soldiers who say: "Yes, Sir!" But Bilal, who technically was considered a slave, did better. He was owned by a master, but he learned that there was another Master, who had more right to be obeyed. As long his earthly master commanded that which did not contradict his Divine Master, he obeyed him; but when his earthly master commanded that which contradicted the commands of his Divine Master, then no obedience was due to the former. He challenged them in the same way Pharaoh's magicians said to their master: "decree whatever thou desirest to decree: for thou canst only decree touching the life of this world;" (the Qur'an, 20:72).

The issue of monotheism and polytheism is at present vague and dim: how can it be otherwise when we ourselves, not having had matured in relation to this issue, do not bear it to people in the proper way? I did quote above the prophets' message, one and all, as the Qur'an reports: "Serve Allah, and eschew the *taghoot* 'the transgressor beyond all bounds'!" (16:36) About this message, the Qur'an also says, addressing Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him: "it has already been revealed to thee – as it was to those before thee – 'if thou were to join gods with God, truly fruitless will be thy work in life, and thou wilt surely be in the ranks of those who lose all good' " (39:65). It is the easiest thing to observe, in connection with the last verse, how we, Muslims, are losers – who indeed is a bigger loser than we are in the whole world! How, when no day passes but we have poured on our heads severe catastrophes that humiliate us, so that we no longer can raise our head, neither before others, nor even in private.

I know that I view the world and understand it in a way different from what many view and understand. But this helps me see the light of the Qur'an. I feel that my conception helps me confront the world and announce what I have to say. I feel this approach makes the laws of the world match the verses of the Qur'an. We realize that the laws of the world and the verses of the Qur'an proceed from the same Source, and when they work together there is great light, and they will give man a great peace.

Take for instance the Qur'anic verse, "Let there be no compulsion in religion:" (2:256). It neutralizes the use of power over man's heart and mind. Allah allows no material power to control man's heart and mind. He protects man's conscience from compulsion. It is so because belief that is the result of compulsion is not belief, nor is disbelief: that is why, if Muslims conquer an unbeliever physically, he has the right to adhere to his disbelief, and Muslims are bound to respect that and to let him be. One achievement of modernity has been its declaration of the freedom of faith; it is an article that is included in all modern constitutions. It asserts that man's faith is protected, that he may not be made to change his faith by force, but rather by persuasion. Now this principle, that force may not be the means to changing people's faith took root when some nations' physical strength reached a point where it could destroy the earth and all life upon it. This maximization of strength led to important and obvious results, although people's adhering to old habits, and the long tradition of yielding to force, continues to be operative, although their hold keeps weakening. Since the first atomic bomb was detonated more than fifty years back, a new state of things has started to take

place, although the world does not seem to fully appreciate it, as the old language of threats is still in use: it is a language that is obsolete in practice, but is still in theory, opposite to many situations in which we assert an idea in theory, but do not act upon it in practice. Now after force has lost its theoretical basis, it has become a killing crime. That is why the big powers no longer fight among themselves and it has ceased to be an option among them: they know this well, and abide by it, too. Among the big powers, violence and fighting are no longer in use; but they are still the policy when they deal with the less fortunate parts of the world. In these other parts of the world, to which we belong, people still believe in force, that real change can be effected through compulsion. Let it be remembered, however, that once we, small powers, engage in violence, as we often do, the benefiting party will be the big powers. This is such a true rule that anyone, among the small powers, who tries to solve his problem by resorting to violence, will have sold his case to the big enemies; and that is so no matter if one happens to be the initiator of violence or not.

As for the big powers, some do fall to be sure, but not through fighting, as happened to the former Soviet Union. It collapsed from within, not because of any external enemy who intervened in their life and brought about their collapse.

We may also look at the other side of the coin: what happened to Japan, a nation that surrendered unconditionally as a result of the two atomic bombs dropped on it during the Second World War. And then, not long after that, you see the Japanese sitting, without possessing atomic weaponry, on a footing with the seven big powers of the world. There must be in this a lesson to learn how this happened without destructive weapons: the Japanese are human beings like us, and without even a Divine Book, not being Jews, Christians, or Muslims; and in this there is more reason to reflect and try to understand how it happened.

Therefore we may say, Abdul-Jabbar, that when the Qur'an commands us to have ready against our enemy all the strength we can (8:60), the strength we need to take care of is no longer that of physical weaponry; we do know that, in the above verse Muslims were commanded to have steeds of war ready, but of course nobody would now consider having horses in stables in preparation for war, nor having spears and swords. Likewise, we no longer do we need to have ready tanks, atomic bombs nor Teton bombs. They are all obsolete. As long as man has the skill to control and to think can adopt other alternatives. For man is enabled by God to corrupt his soul, or to purify it; he is also enabled to control things.

One effect of the obsolescence of the physical power's control of the intellect is the coming into existence of the European Union. It was not imposed with force – on the contrary, it came into existence in response to the elimination of physical conflict, the physical conflict which had long been adopted for the gaining of advantage and prestige. Modern Europe was not united by a Napoleon or a Hitler, though each had reached Russia and the Arab World: but one died by committing suicide, while the other died in exile. And now, when Europe unites, it is not on the basis of Germany above all, or France above all; it is rather on the basis of Germany is equal to any other member of the Union. It is on the basis of getting over all the arrogant boastfulness; it is by getting over the stinking chauvinism

that the Messenger, peace be upon him, cautioned against: "Abandon that ethnic arrogance, for it stinks."

I am not unaware of some of the objections to these ideas. Some will cite Israel, which adopts force, and has used it in establishing itself, in maintaining its existence and in guaranteeing its survival. Malek Bennabi used to compare Israel to the red cloth which is carried by a matador: a red cloth is carried to infuriate the bull, and the bull will butt at the cloth, unaware of the man who holds the cloth; in this way the matador can at the right time stab it.

Those who attach their hopes to weapons are really doing what Israel was established for: It was established to distract our attention from our real woes. As I said, it was Malek Bennabi who gave me such a jolt when he rated Israel as not a primary but a secondary problem. From then, my understanding was improving, until the Second Gulf War came, and that was the last straw. It was an event that exposed all the shortcomings of Arabs and Muslims: in a minute, we forgot Israel, and turned against our own brethren. All the pre-Islamic culture came to the forefront, for the Arabs used then to attack their own kin with all their might. We suddenly thought that one Arab state was more dangerous for Arabs than Israel and its allies.

Considerations like the above show that the Islamist's culture is the same as the secularist's, despite all their superficial differences. They are the same in their blind allegiances to a past that we have not brought under analysis, or to foreign systems that we do not comprehend, to systems that are really on their way to decadence and disintegration. The Islamists are not more perceptive than the secularists, nor are they more capable of conducting an investigation into things, but let us hope that the new generation will learn more as more experiences are accumulating. If the events of Afghanistan and Algeria are deplorable, the events in Turkey and Iran give us hopes that come rather as a surprise.

We need to look sharp at the events in Iran and Turkey, and to interpret them in a mature way, and I personally have my own reading of those events. What happened in Iran is something new, unprecedented in the Muslim World. Until it happened, all the political changes in the Muslim World used to take place through an internal coup, through tribal or familial rivalry. The public, the common people were absent from the scenes. In some cases it was the military commanders who led the coup d'état. Iran's revolution was unlike any of the above: it was the masses' revolution, and the woman's before the man's. That was a major shift in perspective, a most radical change of events. It was such a great event that its greatness was perhaps why we did not appreciate it! Some merely said it was miraculous, some said it was a Divine act, that it cannot be analyzed with reference to the laws of this world. When the Shah issued his edicts of curfew, Khomeini commanded people to defy the Shah's command and go out into the streets, men and women. They had nothing in their hands but flowers to offer to soldiers. Women are more efficient in such a situation than men; nor does such procedure require any military training, nor any weapons: the only condition is that each individual announces that he/she is free in practicing his/her faith: I'll hold on to my faith, and I disbelieve in that other doctrine, so kill me if you like. And big numbers were actually killed, but there was always someone ready to

replace the martyr. In that way, the Shah was expelled without any shot against him; no one was trying to assassinate him. That was the way for transferring the authority to the masses. They realized that no power could resist the people's power. That was a new discovery, a new power in the full sense of newness. It was not in need for the polling box as in Algeria; nor was it like Afghanistan, where they sought to isolate the woman at home. No internal or external power was able to stop the Iranian revolution.

When people have consciousness no external power can suppress their power. And so, despite all the hue and cry, it was not possible to frustrate the Iranian revolution. It remained steadfast and assertive, despite all the deplorable experience with Iraq. Let me dream here, and let Abdul-Jabbar and the readers forgive me, that the Iranians were capable of dominating Iraq, if they had adhered to the same way they had used with the Shah, but they did not use the same way. But they will learn. The budding democracy of Iran will take root, God willing.

The democratic challenge of Iran is picking speed; they prove that they are capable of conducting free elections, that two different candidates can compete, and that one can be chosen in a peaceful democratic way. The world had thought that though the Khomeini revolution succeeded, Iran would not succeed in its second test, a democratic transfer of authority, but it did succeed. Their progress towards democracy is remarkable, and it is replete with significance. The Iranian nation has enjoyed the sweet taste of success, and will not give up its democracy; the masses are determining their own destiny, and one only can wish them success. It is setting the mode for an Islamic community that its neighbors feel safe with: this is a capital that is invaluable, no money and no treasure are equal to this, to make your neighbor feel safe with you, that your neighbor is sure you will not stab him in the back, even if he does you a mischief, that you only work for his good. This is a new relationship that no troublemakers can spoil, and we hope that there are enough wise people to maintain it, in spite of the discordant voices.

Similarly, the Turks, who had been the first Muslims to throw off Islamic rule, [though really a corrupt caliphate] – it is they themselves who now go ahead of other Muslim nations in challenging secularism with democracy. They proceed in steady steps, and that is a proof that the Almighty God will have His light grow into perfection, and what happens at a local scale will spread to a regional and international scale. Those who uphold isolation and war are becoming less and less, and those who oppose isolation and war are growing in number, and getting more steadfast. Allah did hint to the angels that man would get over mischief and spilling blood (the Qur'an, 2:30), and we have reason to believe that this is coming to be realized. Problems which seemed to have no solution are solvable now, without human sacrifices. I say that not only because I believe in the unseen, but on the basis of actual signs in the real world.

And now, let's get back to the problem of Israel, a phenomenon that did its part in full, by distracting Muslims from their real obligations, from dealing with the huge problems that they have inherited over the centuries. One of the things that are not thought about, for instance, is that Arabs often talk about peace with Israel, although Israel does not have the bases for survival; they harp on peace with Israel, while they ignore the pressing issue of peace among ourselves. It is here

that the work lies. Malek Bennabi used to say: When we begin to talk about colonisibility more than we talk about colonialism, then we are on the way to solving our problems. That the problem lies in us is asserted by God, by His Prophet, peace be upon him, by Adam, and even by the Devil – Allah says, as we recite in the Qur'an: "What! When a single disaster smites you, although ye smote your enemies with one twice as great, do you say: 'Whence is this?' Say to them: 'It is from yourselves;' " (3:165). Incidentally, the Qur'an is the only book that blames the victim more than it blames the oppressor or aggressor; it is so for the oppressor cannot inflict his oppression without our giving him the chance to do so; should we stop giving him the chance, he will just fall. As for the Prophet, peace be upon him, he says, in the course of a long tradition: "Let him who encounters a good outcome praise God for it; and let him who encounters an adverse outcome blame no one but himself." But we are still prepared to blame everyone and anyone, except ourselves.

Adam, peace be upon him, having eaten, together with his wife, from the forbidden tree, and after Allah had reprimanded them: "Did I not forbid you that tree?" he replied, together with his wife: "Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls;" (7:22-23) They accepted to take the responsibility for their mistake, and therefore merited to be appointed viceroys in the earth. As for Satan, he will say to his followers on the Day of Judgment, as the Qur'an reports: "I had no authority over you except to call you, but ye listened to me: then reproach not me, but reproach your own souls;" (14:22)

In this connection, the historian Toynbee summed up history by saying that civilizations did not die like martyrs, but like suicide committers: it is only after civilizations have died that vultures and eagles, come upon the corpses of those civilizations and eat them.

It is worth our while to reflect on what prevents us from considering peace among ourselves. We really have to look into that! There is a long history of wrangling and squabbling among us that blocks our considering the other alternative. I have personally often questioned people about that, and have always found it is merely that people are unable to imagine that we are capable of realizing peace among ourselves, a peace in which there is no loser, in which everyone is a winner: kings, presidents, princes, financiers, land-owners. No one will lose anything; indeed they will all gain. It is something that people in our part of the world cannot imagine, because they have a presupposition that problems may not be solved without eliminating the other, or grabbing what he has. The truth, however, is that in this new alternative no one will be a loser; all will be winners; and we can actually observe how this is happening on the earth, not in a remote galaxy. History is the best witness to the outcome of peaceful dealings and aggressive dealings. Therefore, the more Israel impedes peaceful efforts, the more we should solidify peace among ourselves, and blame ourselves for our mistakes, not blame each other.

I address this not to politicians and statesmen, who are preoccupied with their immediate problems. I address the ordinary person, the ordinary man and woman. To them I say there is a solution in which there is no loser, all are winners. We have a presupposition inculcated in us, even before we learn to talk, that we need

to eliminate some party to unite the Muslims. In this way we condone the stabbing in the back, and we extol the conduct of those who betray: the implication of our behavior is that to get over treason, the only way is to do further treason. The truth is that the right approach to eliminating wrongdoing is not to commit more wrongdoing, but to behave righteously. When I speak of peace among ourselves, I do not call to this in secret, but publicly. Is it a sin to call to this peace among ourselves? Only a guilty conscience may stand in the way to this objective. This is not even a call to democracy, for democracy is still a far cry, but at least let us begin with something within our reach. If we proceed with this, people will feel that there is room for an idea other than what is prevalent so far, that there are some who believe in this other option, who discuss it, and who meet to affirm it. It is a simple thing that I am calling to, so let us repeat it frequently enough until it becomes familiar to the ears of everybody. At present people say what many peoples used to say to the prophets as the Qur'an reports: "Never did we hear such a thing as he says among our ancestors of old;" (23:24). We should repeat until it becomes a quite familiar thing to people, and until they themselves say it. At least in this way it will settle into people's hearts that there can be peace and safety among Muslims and believers. How else can peace be realized? If that settles into our consciousness, then we shall hail those who contribute to the peace and safety among Arabs and Muslims, not those who want to unite the Arabs or Muslims with the sword.

Let us remember how with a minimum of cooperation among Arabs during the 1973 war, they accomplished something: they felt that their oil belonged to them, and they felt the confidence of crossing the fear barrier. Let us remember on the other hand that when two Arab countries fell apart in the Gulf war, they lost their dignity and their money. Not after more than ten years can we sit together amicably. The road to peace is still open, but we need to have the concepts right in our minds and then to talk; we need to talk with full understanding and consciousness. At the moment, the way to peace is not evident even in theory, let alone its realization in practice. We need to explore the way of peace, and to pave that way, so that people may go along that way with confidence.

People have certain preconceptions which are not voiced, but which are more operative than any written and signed contract: they have implicitly conspired that since the time Muslims lost the right guided state, and since they fell into a state of compulsion in politics (with the coming of the Umayyads), it was right for regaining that upright state to resort to compulsion and treachery. No one said that, as it is not right to be announced, but everyone had it in mind, and it was transmitted to everyone, until it has settled down as the most natural thing. Not until now can we dare face that implicit complicity; we do not recall it to consciousness to be healed of it, or to start to be healed of it. But we have really to get back to that right guided approach in understanding the words of the Lord when He says: "Let there be no compulsion in religion: uprightness stands out clear from error: whoever rejects *taghoot* 'the tyrannical transgressor' and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks;" (2:256). In the above verse when Allah says: 'Let there be no compulsion in religion,' this directive is indicative of what distinguishes uprightness from error or misguidance; that compulsion IS misguidance. That becomes more manifest when we go to the third clause, 'whoever rejects *taghoot* and believes in God …', for the

taghoot believes in compulsion; indeed his life, survival, and very existence are based on compulsion. To reject that *taghoot*, and to believe in Allah, that is in Allah's religion, and to believe in His command to abstain from compulsion – that is grasping the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks.

Another aspect of that implicit and misguided complicity, something that has spread until it is taken to be for granted is that if truth and falsehood are given equal chance, falsehood will have the better of truth, that truth will be defeated, and people will choose falsehood, rather than truth. Now first of all this is mistrusting God; it is about an attitude like this that the Qur'an says: "moved by wrong suspicions of God – suspicions due to ignorance;" (3:154) and it says: "But this thought of yours which ye did entertain concerning your Lord, hath brought you to destruction, and now have ye become of those utterly lost;" (41:23) And secondly, God says about truth and falsehood, that "truth has now arrived, and falsehood perished: for falsehood is by its nature bound to perish;" (17:81) The Qur'an never says that once falsehood arrives, truth will perish, but it is settled in our hearts that it is so. Somehow it has been inspired into our hearts over the centuries to dread falsehood in an unnatural and unwarranted degree. The Qur'an says: "Say: 'the truth has arrived, and falsehood neither creates anything new, nor restores anything;" (34:49). And it says: "Nay, we hurl the truth against falsehood, and it knocks out its brain, and behold, falsehood doth perish;" (21:18)

It is mistrusting God; it is also mistrusting truth and Islam, when we suppose that if people are given the choice, they will abandon truth and Islam. It is in the third place mistrusting man, when we think that he is more inclined to evil than to goodness. But man does not have peace of heart except when he chooses goodness; it is when men sink into ignorance that their bad deeds will seem good in their eyes. Therefore, it is our duty to deliver the message in the clearest way. When things are quite manifest, then those who insist on adhering to falsehood, the condemned, will be a small minority. It is God's law that the majority of people will choose truth once it is made absolutely clear.

[Translator's note: Mr. Sa'eed has skipped the reply to Question Two, without explicitly saying why. It seems that he assumed that he had said enough about it in the course of his answer to Question One.]

Q. 3: What are the main features of your project "The laws of changing individuals and societies?" Do you consider that project an off-shoot of Malek Bennabi's project, "Crises of Civilizations?"

A. 3: It may be as you say, that my project has been an off-shoot of Malek Bennabi's project, "Crises of Civilization." I am keen, however, on reviving the words of the Qur'an.

The word '*sunan*, plural of *sunnah*, i.e. laws,' for instance is a well-established word in the Qur'an. The word '*sunnah*' has been defined by an ancient Muslim scholar as, 'doing in a second instance the same as was done in a first instance'. This is an attempt to elucidate the word *sunnah* or *sunnan* as it appears in such verses of the Qur'an as: "But no change wilt thou find in God's '*sunnah*, way of

dealing'; no turning off wilt thou find God's '*sunnah*, way of dealing;" (35:43). The point of course is that the *'sunan*, or laws' are immutable, anytime their conditions are realized. Fire burns, whenever its conditions are realized; and a society will collapse, whenever the conditions for its collapse are realized. A *'sunnah*, or law' is invariably operative, and the Qur'an asserts about a certain '*sunnah*' that: "it was due from us to aid those who believed;" (30:47) "God never fails in His promise;" (3:9).

This is a topic that needs to be discussed and rediscussed until it comes to the notice of people, in a realistic and operative way; it needs to be seen in the material domain, but also in the psychological, individual, and social domains. At present, things are sometimes confused, but it must be affirmed that there are settled laws and systems in the world that do not fail to be operative. It is no big claim to say that the most profound part of knowledge is the discovery of the '*sunan*, laws', for once they are understood, those who know them can use them to control things; and it is for this that man was placed on the earth.

I know that I am putting forth a project, a first step. I hope that scholars and the rising generation take it up and bring it to a more elaborate and comprehensive stage. That things will come to maturity is indeed a certainty, for Allah has ordained that His light will come to be perfected, no matter how those opposed to it endeavor to impede its progress.

Another word drawn from the Qur'an is 'change', in the sense of bringing change about, and in the sense that change is bound to take place. The full weight of the word must be made clear; it is indeed a very significant word, for it indicates that what has changed to the worse, can again be put right. One aspect of this is that to have something right and good to begin with is easier than changing something bad to good. From the Qur'an, one understands that to change that which is in one's mind is the task of man, and not of God: "Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change that which is in their souls;" (13:11). Two changes are mentioned by Allah, and the change in people's mind or soul is to be realized by them before their condition, their favorable or adverse state, is changed by God: the change from God is here the welfare of people, the visible conditions of people. One needs to come to deal with this in real life to learn how the conditions of a people may be changed following the change they effect in their own souls. One does not change one's mind, but that which is in his mind; the expression 'that which is in their souls' shows the accuracy of the Qur'anic terms: one's soul is a receptacle that can hold good concepts and bad concepts.

The word '*nafs*, soul' is another pivotal word in the Qur'an: you find, 'the soul prone to evil,' (12:53) 'the self-reproaching soul' (75:2) and 'the soul in complete rest,' (89:27). Psychology is therefore an important science, though Muslims are still much apprehensive about it, as it is associated in their minds with the names of Freud and some other persons who are identified with evil purposes. The truth of course is that it is a science, and a science is not in the possession of the east or the west: We need to know all that there is to know about this science; our knowledge of this science should not make do with some hazy and rudimentary notions. Another word, 'society', does not seem to be as steeped in Qur'anic

terminology as the other words: the nearest term in the Qur'an is *'ummah*, nation'; another related word is *'jama'ah*, group, band'.

In Malek Bennabi's project, one comes across a realistic and law-based approach, more fitted to modernity-oriented minds than my approach. I usually avoid using words like 'civilization' and 'culture', and have a bias for words drawn from the Qur'an or the Prophet, peace be upon him, or those used in Islamic heritage. I am quite concerned with discussing the *'sunan*, or laws' of Allah, and His signs in the world around us and in the in the world of the human mind. At the same time, I am equally concerned with reactivating the Qur'an's terminology. Indeed, after having studied Malek Bennabi, I had to work real hard to find suitable words from the Qur'an to discuss such things as civilization and culture.

We have done some work, and have for a lot of effort accomplished little. But for those who come later, they will with less effort do better work, and will come upon the right terminology and deal with the right concepts. Al-Ghazali says: "A person who seeks the concepts or the sense by working on words will get lost and will reap nothing: he will be like one whose destination is towards the west, but he proceeds towards the east; as for him who first works on concepts and then seeks the right terms for those concepts, this one is right-guided." Therefore, the right approach is to seek to understand things first, and then find Qur'anic terminology that expresses those concepts. That is the principle I work upon. I dedicate my effort to finding ways to changing Muslims and changing what is in their minds; (and in this Malek Bennabi is a great help;) and then I try to address the Muslim consciousness with the words of the Qur'an or words drawn from Islamic heritage.

Q. 4: In your writings, you stress that there are two sources of knowledge: the Qur'an, and human history – that a man who ignores human history cannot think properly. So how would you place human history in relation to the Qur'an? And how can world history be so indispensable in approaching the Qur'an?

A. 4: Well, I may say again, Abdul-Jabbar, you have quite succeeded in touching on those ideas which are most intimate to me. Yes, it is fair what you require. I need to be quite clear and open. I need to provide abundant examples and illustrations. We read in the Bible how Jesus Christ used to speak in parables, and never to speak but with parables. We also read in the Qur'an: "And such are the parables We set forth for mankind, but only those understand them who have knowledge;" (29:43)

It is true that a person who does not know history does not only lack knowledge – he also is not reliable as a thinker. Knowledge and the intellect are history; they are experience. Without history, there will be no knowledge and no intellect. To have sound thinking is to relate causes and effects; the mind is not a system of thinking, but a system of relating causes with effects, and how that may be translated into a reality. When a human being is born, he is endowed with the potential capacity to read; however, he may live all his life illiterate; therefore that potential he had for learning how to read and write remains idle, and the ability is not transformed into a reality. Likewise, the word ' '*akl*, mind' is not used in the Qur'an as a noun, but as a verb. The Qur'an does not say that people 'do not have a

mind,' (because they were endowed with the ability), bur rather that they 'do not understand,' that is they do not relate causes to effects.

It is history that testifies to the truthfulness of the Qur'an. Allah himself, as we find in His Scripture, directs us to go to history to make sure that the Qur'an is authentic: "Soon will We show them Our signs in the furthest regions of the earth, and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the truth. Is it not enough that thy Lord doth witness all things?" (41:54) It is so because no one can meddle with the outcomes of history. Many make a mistake here when they confound what people state, what they think about events, with the outcomes of people's thoughts. The history of communism is not what people, those supporting communism or those opposing it, have written about it: The history os communism is its outcome. This is not a condemning the objective of fair distribution of resources, but a condemnation of a particular way adopted for fulfilling that objective. The objective itself was not wrong, but the way adopted for fulfilling that objective was. For if we were to condemn the objective, we would have to concede that Islam also failed. But things are not like this.

Let me deviate a little to put in something that will be seen to be relevant by and by. It is fruitful to compare physical health and mental health. There was a time when people knew almost nothing about the causes of diseases; epidemics invaded large areas and reaped many thousands or even millions. But there are really other diseases, diseases of wrong thinking, regional or universal, that also kill abundant numbers. Like the epidemics, wars are the result of diseases, though they are intellectual, conceptual diseases. Before the germs that killed human beings were discovered, people used to kiss somebody that they loved, killing the beloved one unintentionally – and they cried over the dear victim of their own ignorance. That is something that we understand, but do not we transmit fatal ideas to people, being quite careful in conveying those ideas most honestly? And then, when those ideas result in fighting and hostility, and when people are the victims of the hostility among them, we fail to see how this stems from our poor understanding of human problems. The Qur'an asserts that it is left to us to purify our souls or corrupt them (91:9-10). And so we need to work hard on these topics, to get over our illusions and fancies.

One way to do so is to think about the relation between a text and the real things in the world, like trees, or living things, which are handled by the text. I once wrote about that relation. between the text and a concrete object, like the tree, or a living thing, or even an inanimate thing. Now, no matter how well and how extensively scientists or others write about a living or an inanimate object, their writings will not do justice to that thing, until we go to the thing itself and examine it directly. That is the actual reference when any disagreement rises. Even if God describes something in words, that created thing, the concrete thing itself, shows its reality more evidently than any words. Let it be noted that when God reveals a Book, He uses human words (this is indicated in the Qur'an in the following verse: "We sent not an apostle except to teach in the language of his own people;" 14:4,) but when He creates something, He does not use human elements. Let it be remembered, too, that God did not send down a Book until men had learned to read and write; and reading and writing are human things, with

all human shortcomings. The Divine creation, on the other hand, has all the absoluteness of God, although creation goes on developing and progressing.

We can now connect the last two paragraphs to history and say that Allah directs us to refer to His creation itself to learn the wisdom of the creation. We find the following in the Qur'an:

- 'Travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who rejected truth,' (3:137)
- 'Then see what was the end of those who were admonished, but heeded not,' (37:73)
- 'So see what was the end of those who made mischief,' (7:103)
- 'Then see what was the end of those who indulged in sin and crime' (7:84)
- 'But see what was the end of those who did wrong,' (10:39).

That about the wrong-doers; about the upright, we also have another set of verses:
- 'The end is best for the righteous,' (7:128)
- ' .. who gets home in the end,' (13:42)
- '.. Soon will ye know who it is whose end will be best,' (6:135).

It is also relevant to recall how Iqbal finds the best criterion of the quality of a civilization or culture, to observe the type of man it has produced. These points are not difficult; people often notice similar facts spontaneously; so we need to ponder over them. Have you not noticed how people spontaneously find the surest proof of a certain event to be the outcome that it gives rise to? The Qur'an supports this, when in so many locations it directs us to observe the ends and outcomes, both in favorable and adverse situations. Likewise, the Messenger, peace be upon him, says: "Many peoples that preceded you brought about their perdition when they forgave a thief if he happened to be a person of high status; but punished a thief if he had no status." We have to think of the above tradition not as a sacred text, but as a historical law: It empirically directs us to observe how a certain line of behavior led to a certain outcome; we do not expect a more rigorous rule than to measure the correctness of a certain behavior against the outcome that it leads to. That is the gist of historical laws, and in this way history would be our lab for examining human behavior. Is not this the way people conduct their experiments and do their observations in the labs of scientific investigation? Our observation of human behavior must always be given priority in our scientific investigation.

Take now the Qur'anic verse, "Let there be no compulsion in religion;" (2:256). Here we have the words of God, but still we may make wrong deductions in analyzing the verse. Muslims have indeed blundered a lot when they failed to let people choose their beliefs without compulsion. They assumed that should we act on the above verse, allowing people to choose to be believers or unbelievers, great numbers of Muslims would abandon the faith. This delusion has led to tragic situations. Why do not those who doubt the truth of this verse notice how the former Soviet Union collapsed under our very noses, when it was the state that practiced compulsion in beliefs. It collapsed, and it was such a resounding collapse! And it will be followed by all those who try to coerce people to accept doctrines that they do not want to accept. It is the law that those who use

compulsion will perish, and God says that in another location of the Qur'an: "Seest thou not how thy Lord dealt with 'Ad people, of the city of Iram, with lofty pillars, the like of which were not produced in all the land? And with the Thamud people, who cut out huge rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh, lord of stakes? All these transgressed beyond bounds in the lands, and heaped therein mischief on mischief. Therefore did thy Lord pour on them a scourge of diverse penalties. For thy Lord is as a Guardian on a watch-tower." (89:6-14) The Qur'an mentions both the conduct of people, and their ends or outcomes; it also affirms that the law will be applied again every time similar conduct is done: "If ye revert, We shall revert to Our punishments;" (17:8) "Never do We give such requital except to such as are ungrateful rejecters." (34:17)

Is it not right that, in the light of the above verses and rules, we say: Have you not seen what your Lord has done to the Soviet Union? And to the Shah of Iran? Let it be noticed that the events which took place after the revelation of the Qur'an were more momentous and numerous than the events which took place before it. Therefore we say: Where is the Soviet Union, with all its war heads and missiles? It was definitely greater than Pharaoh and Thamud. We may also, with reference to history, predict that the United States will not be what it is now. It may stay as a great power, but its present arrogance and high-handed ways will definitely vanish. At present, it does not deal with people even-handedly: It rates some as above the law, and rates others as helpless and so it assaults them. When God condemns those who deal with people with double measures (83:1), what about a great power that has no measure at all? Pharaoh was destroyed for he, 'elated himself in the land and broke up its people into sections, depressing a small group among them;" (28:4)

Another thing about inequality and arrogance is the Veto Right; it is the worst form of polytheism in the world; and the worst thing about it is that no one is pressing for its elimination. On the contrary, those who do not have this right crave it and cry out that they should be granted this right. One is reminded of Qarun, the extremely wealthy man of Moses's people, who, when he went forth among his people in the full pride of his worldly glitter, those whose aim was the life of this world said: 'Oh! That we had the like of what Qarun has got!' (the Qur'an, 28:79) Exactly as many now envy those who have the Veto Right! It is true that anyone who recites the Qur'an is familiar with Qarun's story, but we still have events in the real world to be observed and analyzed.

One people, the people of Jonah, are singled out in the Qur'an, as having succeeded in learning the lesson, and making the right change: "Why was there not a single township among those We warned, which believed, so its faith should have profited it – except the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the penalty of ignominy, in the life of the present, and permitted them to enjoy their life for a while;" (10:98). People do have some sense of the benefits of observing the signs of history. Iqbal had this in mind when he suggested in the fifth chapter of his book, *Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam*, that one criterion for judging the mission and message of a prophet is to observe the kind of human being he produced, the kind of culture that emerged as a result of his message. He particularly stresses one great idea of Islam, which is putting an end to prophethood. He also says: "Man is naturally controlled by his emotion and

instinct; it is only the conductive mind which enables man to have control over his environment. When we succeed in rising to having this faculty, we have to lay it more firmly and solidly, by suppressing any ways of knowledge that do not employ this method.

"Now having the above in mind," adds Iqbal, "we find that the Prophet of Islam, appeared at the juncture between the ancient world and the modern world. As far as chronology is concerned, his message belonged to the ancient world, but as far as the spirit of that message is concerned, he belongs to the modern world. In his message, new sources of knowledge are introduced, that more fit the modern life with the advent of Islam, and in this way Islam announces the birth of the conductive mind.

"Now prophethood, as it is perceived in Islam, reaches it perfection, by realizing the need for its termination. And that perception indicates the deep realization of the impossibility of having man led for ever with a harness. By abolishing monasticism and hereditary monarchy, by the Qur'an's exhortation everywhere to resort to the intellect and experimentation, by its insistence on exploring the universe, and getting acquainted with the lives of the preceding peoples, by pointing out all the above as sources of human knowledge, the Qur'an is stressing the idea of putting an end to prophethood… The Qur'an announces the existence of two more sources of knowledge in existence: nature and history. The spirit of Islam is demonstrated more manifestly in opening up a way to research through these two sources. In the signs of the sun and the moon, in observing the extension of the shade, and the succession of the day and the light, and the diversity of colors and tongues, and the moving around of fortunes among peoples, we may not pass by all that without taking note of them."

To get at things like the above needs a great effort. Even a man as great as al-Ghazali said that the mind's function was to lead you to Allah and his Prophet, and then you do not need it any more. That was the way they saw things. One wonders now how things seemed like this to them when the Qur'an warns us not to be of "those whose efforts have been wasted in this life, while they thought that they were acquiring good by their works;" (18:104) or the other verse: "Is he, then, to whom the evil of his conduct is made alluring, so that he looks upon it as good, equal to one who is rightly guided?" (35:8) But history is always there, no matter how people ignore its lessons: it is there to teach us its lessons. It is indeed a patient instructor; its laws and ways are firm and solid; it will never desist, it is always waiting for us to change our ability to comprehend. I am quite contented that God will enable those who come after us to appreciate the importance of these issues, and understand them in ways that we are quite unable to imagine.

Q. 5: Jawdat Sa'eed is a great promoter of the repudiation of violence. He goes so far as to call for the discarding of the sword and all weaponry; he likens the purchase of arms to the purchase of idols. His doctrine of the 'Way of Adam's Son' is inseparable from Jawdat Sa'eed's name, since that way was put forth in the title of his first book. So the question would naturally arise: Is Jawdat Sa'eed upholding the annulment of 'jihad', an established Islamic obligation, even when all its conditions are met? Is he calling for disobeying Allah's command, "Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power," (the Qur'an, 8:60)?

Is it right in his point of view that we be passive spectators while the Zionist enemy is amassing its huge arsenal? Is he calling for terminating the resistance movements in the face of destructive powers?

A. 5: You are trying to provoke me, Abdul-Jabbar, in this longest of your questions. But you are right to require that I should make things most evident, to say all that is to say concerning the use of violence.

When I published my book, *The Way of Adam's Better Son*, more than thirty years ago, I was concerned with bringing out my idea, just to announce it. I did not hope then to convince people of the presented ideas; and that is why I said in the preface that the book was for announcement and not for persuasion. Many people wrote to me that I had to try to persuade people, and to write with that intention, not just to declare my ideas. All that shows you how difficult that topic is. Many doubts were raised concerning it. But I assure you that once we understand the topic, we will wonder how it was unclear to us. It is something like when people for many centuries could not understand that it is not the sun that goes round us, but it is we who go round the sun.

This shows me in what darkness we still live! We need to explore the prevalent concepts which impede the way to understanding, what blocks people's hearing and vision. This is something that is given great attention in the Qur'an, when it says: "Deaf, dumb, and blind, they will not return to the path;" (2:18) and when it says: "Has he made the gods all into one God? Truly this is a wonderful thing! … We never heard the like of this among the people of these latter days;" (38:5-7) That the Qur'an is in our hands avails us nothing. Do not you see how the Jews and the Christians have the Bible, but it avails them nothing? And science and all fields of knowledge are there, but they do not help us. The tragic condition of the Muslim World is glaringly obvious to any observer, and that should be a great motive for people to inquire and look for the facts: What makes Muslims the greatest losers in the whole world? That was my point of departure, when I started my work; and I had confidence in persuading the human mind, not in subduing it.

This brings me to your question. Unless we admit that man will give on the basis of persuasion more than he will give on the basis of intimidation and compulsion, then we have not started to understand man or even God. So let us look at three points. **The First Thing** is Allah: We think that we know about Allah, but we really do not; just as the verses of the Qur'an describe this situation: "But this thought of yours which ye did entertain concerning your Lord, hath brought you to destruction, and now have ye become of those utterly lost!" (41:23) This must be a reminder to us that our understanding of God does not have to be right. I here remember Ali Shari'ati, a giant of a thinker, a sociologist who specialized in comparative religions: When I read his book *Man and Islam* I felt that he was like a first-class athlete moving among crippled people; that is because he has eyes that can see, ears that can hear, and a mind that functions most effectively. He can strike fire in the hearts of those who read well, and he is a man of great faith. Ali Shari'ati says: "Every society makes up its god to match its light;" which is very true, for if we want to know God, we have no way of knowing Him except through His creation. **The Second Thing** to know is God's creation, this universe. We need to know it; and when we learn the facts of the universe, we shall find that

God created it to work on the basis of firm *sunan*, laws; *sunan* that are firm but that leave room for development; I mean that God creates new things, that God as the Qur'an says: "adds to creation as He pleases;" (35:1). **The Third Thing** to know is man, and we have to deal with man as a separate entity, as different from other living beings, because of the nervous system; it is through the nervous system that man is enabled to reflect and to discover the laws.

All three need to be taken together. For when you focus on the universe, you find all it constituents point to Allah, and we know God through the universe. It is by observing the universe that we discover how the camels, the mountains, and societies were created. It is because the universe is based on laws that man can control it: by understanding the ways of the world man can control it. That is about discovering the laws and acting on them. When we come to how men deal with men, we find that they hasten to employ muscles rather than understanding. When God says in the Qur'an: "Mankind was one single nation, and God sent messengers with glad tidings and warnings;" (2:213) I find that mankind was one nation and is still so. They think alike: they everywhere still resort to exercising physical strength to subjugate the others. It was so in the past, and it is still so at present. What Pharaoh said, 'I am your lord, most high;' is still used most widely; and the Pharaoh of our time, America, still says what the ancient Pharaoh used to say.

As long as might is right then it is the jungle law that is predominant, and mankind is still one nation, that is, they are like-minded. Men worshipped power, and still worship power, and worship the one who has the power. This is then the source of discord in the life of man: since man has a nervous system that is capable of understanding, and of controlling his life through understanding, then he should not be dominated by another human being like him. This is my life mission that I raised long ago, and that I am still working on. Only last year I published a book entitled *Be Like Adam's Son*; and I hope to publish another entitled *Break Your Bow*.

When I say that purchasing weapons is not unlike the purchasing of idols, I say that to shock the Muslim, to really shock the Muslim and the non-Muslim. I am really saying: Mankind! You can really communicate in harmony, and you cannot go on living on the basis of the jungle law. You need to lay concepts and principles and laws for a common harmonious life. Man will not be man until and unless he accepts the way of Adam's better son. When can we understand this, and help Muslims and all human beings to understand this? We need here to refer to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, for without him we shall not be able to understand this issue, especially in our present conditions. I say the Prophet, peace be upon him, because he represents all prophets, and he it is that testifies to their messages, as the Qur'an says: "Truly We have sent thee as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner, and as one who invites to God's grace by his leave, and as a lamp spreading light;" (33:45-56) All the prophets' religion is one, the core being belief in One God, not taking associates with God. As for the rituals, they vary from one prophet's time to another. As for dealing among people, it develops with time, but must never violate the cardinal principle of justice. Indeed the belief in One God is manifested in justice, for injustice is the worst form of polytheism, and polytheism is the worst injustice.

To establish justice among people is to establish monotheism, the common terms between different parties, "that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than God;" (3:64) What we have in the above verse is the principle of fairness, that I grant you the same right as I expect you to grant me; that I forbid you what I forbid myself. No principle can be superior to that, when you grant the other the same as you allow yourself. One merit of this principle is that you do not have to wait for the other to accept the principle. One adopts the principle, and does not wait for the other's consent.

How can one be a Muslim if he does not accept the way of Adam's son? The Messenger, peace be upon him, adhered to this way, when he called people to the faith, compelling no one and dictating no one to accept the faith. Those who accepted the faith were subjected to torture by the Quraysh tribe; the unbelievers tried all they could to compel the believers to revert to disbelief, and when the Messenger, peace be upon him, saw one of the tortured families, he said: "Have patience, Abu Yaser's family; let our meeting place be in Paradise;" not calling them to rise against their tormenters; he only urged them to adhere to the faith, not to give in to their adversaries. The Qur'an itself taught believers: "hold back your hands from fight but establish regular prayers;" (4:77). In the very first *sura* (chapter) revealed to the Prophet, peace be upon him, the Qur'an taught the believers to adhere to their worship and to disobey the trespasser who insisted on imposing his opinion with force: "Seest thou one who forbids a votary when he turns to pray? … heed him not; but bow down in adoration;" (96:9-19). In another location we recite: "And they ill-treated them for no other reason than that they believed in God, Exalted in power;" (85:8). The Prophet, peace be upon him, did not defend himself; and in this we see how working for Islam, from the first moment, started with patience and enduring injury.

We have ample evidence in the Qur'an about that. In one location we have in general terms how the prophets dealt with injury: " Has not the story reached you, (O people!), of those who (went) before you? - of the people of Noah, and 'Ad, and Thamud? - And of those who (came) after them? None knows them but Allah. To them came apostles with Clear (Signs); but they put their hands up to their mouths, and said: "We do deny (the mission) on which ye have been sent, and we are really in suspicious (disquieting) doubt as to that to which ye invite us." Their apostles said: "Is there a doubt about Allah, The Creator of the heavens and the earth? It is He Who invites you, in order that He may forgive you your sins and give you respite for a term appointed!" They said: "Ah! ye are no more than human, like ourselves! Ye wish to turn us away from the (gods) our fathers used to worship: then bring us some clear authority." Their apostles said to them: "True, we are human like yourselves, but Allah doth grant His grace to such of his servants as He pleases. It is not for us to bring you an authority except as Allah permits. And on Allah let all men of faith put their trust. No reason have we why we should not put our trust on Allah. Indeed He hath guided us to the Ways we (follow). We shall certainly bear with patience all the hurt you may cause us. For those who put their trust should put their trust in Allah." And the Unbelievers said to their apostles: "Be sure we shall drive you out of our land, or ye shall return to

our religion." But their Lord inspired (this Message) to them: "Verily We shall cause the wrong-doers to perish! "And verily We shall cause you to abide in the land, and succeed them. This for such as fear the Time when they shall stand before My tribunal,- such as fear the punishment denounced." (14:9-14)

What we have above is a debate not of one particular prophet, but a generic one; and it represents the various peoples. Of course, in other locations the Qur'an handles single situations, but it is the same theme and the same purport of debate: on the prophets' side, it is a call to the way of truth; on the side of the peoples, it is inflicting hurt, banishing, and using compulsion in the hope of bringing a convert back into the people's dogma. It is evidently worth our while to analyze this scenario, to see how the prophets dealt with this situation. They indeed chose to deal with their peoples on an equal footing, on common terms that apply to both parties in an equal measure. The principle of the prophets was: We bring forth our call, and you bring forth your call; neither party will resort to coercion or hurt; no one will be turned out of their home. So let him believe who chooses, and let him disbelieve who chooses: "Let there be no compulsion in religion;" (2:256) "Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject the faith;" (18:29). There is no room for compulsion in religion, in opinion or in beliefs. So let there be competition in persuasion, and let there be no resorting to violence or compulsion; but if the opposing party resorts to such ways, we ourselves must not do the same; "We shall certainly bear with patience all the hurt you may cause us;" (14:12) until people are convinced of the views of either party. In this way, the prophets laid down a general law for dealing with others in the sphere of ideas: that violence should be neutralized; that there should be no compulsion, in religion, opinions, or in politics; that both parties (or we, if they do not agree to do the same) use only persuasion. Only wisdom should be used and a beautiful tone and language; debate and dispute in the best and most gracious way; until change takes place in society. That is the way adopted by Muhammad, peace be upon him, the model for the upright people who will not initiate aggression, and will never resort to compulsion.

Even after the others inflict hurt and use compulsive ways, we may not retaliate with hurt or compulsion, in our endeavor to establish a community that embraces in general the upright way (of no compulsion). After the society has converted to the upright condition, then it may protect people's thoughts and beliefs from aggression: and that right of protecting people's thoughts and beliefs is to be applied to believers in the same way as it is to be applied to unbelievers. The others have the same right as believers do in calling people to their ideas, in a peaceful way, disputing in a gracious way. Not many Muslims at present tolerate to grant others the right to call to their ideas, in an equal degree as they (Muslims) believe they are privileged to have. The reason is that they do not have enough confidence in ideas, or in the religion they hold. But no! They have really to grant others the same right they wish to have in calling to what they believe, banning to others only what they ban to themselves. Indeed, things will be like this by and by, despite anyone's resistance. What will settle down is the law of "the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of mankind remains on the earth;" (the Qur'an, 13:17).

In the same way, if society begins to decline and decay, a Muslim may not resort to any way other than addressing people and directing them to what is right. Should the community accept his call, and after people are converted to it, then that society has the right to protect everybody's right to talk and remonstrate. Those who refuse and insist on employing force, rather than debating in peace, then they are reverting to the law of the jungle; in this case the prophets, one and all, adopted the same attitude, that of Adam's better son; "We shall certainly bear with patience all the hurt you may cause us;" (14:12). In this way the prophets set the principle of genuine democracy. The mistake of modern democracies is that they permit attacking and killing a tyrant or oppressor. This is not the right way; the right way is rather to work peacefully until the society is converted without compulsion.

Muslims at present do not accept the principles of modern democracies, and do not accept human rights. The human rights as put forth by the prophets are predominantly not 'rights' but 'duties'. It is our duty to bring into being the right society and to protect it, all through debate and persuasion, never through compulsion. Those who use compulsion are virtually calling others to use compulsion; in this case, both the victor and the defeated will be applying the jungle law; both, as the prophets teach us, merit to be punished in hell: it is so because both parties are holding up force as a deity. This is a stumbling block for so many people, and it very often hampers understanding. The prophets did not resort to self defense when the representative of society hurt them on account of the idea they held. So, we have to endure the hurt and to keep exhorting the society to develop itself into a nation in which people are not hurt for their beliefs or ideas.

That is why we read the following in the Qur'an about the threat on the part of a certain people, and their prophet's reply: "The leaders, the arrogant party among his people, said: "O Shu'aib! we shall certainly drive thee out of our city - (thee) and those who believe with thee; or else ye (thou and they) shall have to return to our ways and religion." He said: "What! even though we do detest (them)? "We should indeed invent a lie against Allah, if we returned to your ways after Allah hath rescued us therefrom; nor could we by any manner of means return thereto unless it be as in the will and plan of Allah, Our Lord. Our Lord can reach out to the utmost recesses of things by His knowledge." (7:88-89) You have here the principle of building up a people, '*millah,* in Qur'anic terms, as people perceive it, and we have a totally different principle of building up a '*millah*' as the prophets perceive it. As you see in the above report, the prophets' conception is utterly different from the conception commonly held by others, for the prophets would not have compulsion in any way determining the acceptance of principles. That is why when I quoted above the verse about people being one nation in the past, I added that people are still the same one nation, meaning that their principle for the structure a nation is definitely not that of the prophets. People are still the same because they believe in changing others' beliefs and ideas by force; but God sent His prophets to protect people's beliefs and ideas. Anyone who adopts this way may call others to accept his ideas on terms of equality, never using compulsion; no one may take any other as an associate to God by surrendering to compulsion; we should help people to get over the worshipping of men, and to worship none but the Lord of men.

The Muslim World is, with all its constituent nations, intrigued by physical force. Maybe only very lately they began to grope, quite tentatively and with little certainty, towards an alternative to violence. We need to build on that and exhort people to give up violence altogether in the dissemination of ideas, to denounce a politician who assumes his office through force. But how should this denunciation be shown? Not by assassinating a politician, nor by assaulting him physically: it is by disobeying him whenever he commands that which contradicts God's commands, by making it clear that we do not subscribe to a reversion to the jungle law. People work under the illusion that if they refuse to obey they will be put to death: this is an illusion because the bigger the number of people who accept this way of producing change, the more it is difficult for the oppressor to kill even one individual, let alone a whole society. This then is the smooth and merciful way of change, merciful for all parties. It is the least costly way and the most beneficial. It is unfortunate that we remain unaware of this way, nor do we adopt it or awaken people to its blessings. For those who know about this, they are guilty of a heinous sin: the sin of suppressing God's Signs (ref. to the Qur'an, 2:174). If we can drive into people's consciousness this way, children, women and the elderly can take part in using it; we do not just need 'able-bodied' athletic young men; we do not need heaps of money and weaponry. On the contrary, we reject all that, and we say: 'we insist on announcing this and calling to it; if you like to put us to death on that charge, go ahead.' This is what we were taught by Noah, the father of prophets, peace be upon him, as the Qur'an reports: "Relate to them the story of Noah. Behold! He said to his people: 'O my people, if it be hard on your mind that I should stay with you and commemorate the Signs of God, yet I put my trust in God. Get ye then an agreement about your plan and among your partners, so your plan be not to you dark and dubious. Then pass your sentence on me, and give me no respite;" (10:71)

I must be clear and say: I am not annulling jihad; I am merely showing that the jihad of the Messenger, peace be upon him, is not the same as that of the '*kharijites*, the schismatics.' Just after the era of the Upright Caliphs, from the era of the Umayyads, all Muslims adopted the way of the *kharijites*, the schismatics. This may be easily understood if we remember that a government that is created by force is not a lawful government, nor is it an upright government; it is a government of aberration and aggression. When you have a society properly constructed, any one who falls out of it, disrupting its system, then the way to deal with such people is as the Qur'an directs us: "If two parties among the believers fall into a quarrel, make ye peace between them; but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then fight ye against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of God; but if it complies, then make peace between them with justice, and be fair: for God loves those who are fair and just;" (49:9)

This is when a person who rules on the basis of persuading people has to face a transgressor. But if a transgressor has to face another transgressor, then it is just the confrontation of two blind, misguided powers. When the situation is like that, the Messenger, peace be upon him, commands one to avoid siding with any of the disputing groups. A number of traditions of the Prophet direct a Muslim to distance himself from the chaotic clashes; we are commanded to break our sword; a Muslim is directed then to stay at home, and even if the aggressor enters one's

home, he is to reply with the words of Adam's son [a ref. to the parable in the Qur'an, in which Adam's son says to his killing-intent brother: 'If thou stretch thy hand against me, to slay me, it is not for me to stretch my hand against thee to slay thee;' (5:28)]. The Prophet went so far as to urge the Muslim, if the glitter of the assailant's sword is too dazzling to bear, let him throw his shirt over his eyes.

This must show you that I feel no contradiction, nor do I feel that I have annulled jihad; I feel quite in harmony with the traditions of the Messenger, peace be upon him, and indeed with the conduct of all the prophets. Of course, the Messenger, peace be upon him, was not contradicting himself when he said, side by side with the above traditions urging a Muslim to hold back his hand: "An arrow shot in the cause of God will intercede for three men to enter Paradise: its maker, its sharpener, and its thrower." Nor do I feel that this last tradition contradicts the Messenger's saying in another tradition: "Break your bow, blunt it, and snap its chord; strike with your sword at a rock until it is blunted;" and his saying in another tradition: "Let him who has a flock [at a time of political turmoil] take his flock to a far-away hill; let him who has some camels go and take care of his camels; let him who has a piece of land cultivate his land [to distance himself from the chaotic agitation;]" and when someone asked him what if one who has nothing of the above, he said: "Let him stay at his home, and do as Adam's Son did." Indeed, the problem of the *kharijites*, the schismatics, has not yet been analyzed: the *kharijites* are people who were intent on establishing a society on the basis of compulsion. It has been reported that Ali, may God give him grace, said: "Do not fight the *kharijites* after me." If he did say that, it is not in the sense that the *kharijites'* way was legitimated, but because all the groups would accept the their way. This is quite true, and until today the issue has not been clarified. In all the studies and analyses I have come across about the legality of war, the state and the nation, eastern or western, I have never seen anything clearer, more manifest and more practicable than the prophets' way, whose method I have tried to present above. I wish I could present it better; but I am sure that the theorizers and thinkers of the future, Muslim or non-Muslim, will be more able to clarify this and make it plain for everyone to understand, so that no one would be at a loss or desperate how to get out of the jungle law. God has indeed taught the prophets the best '*sunan*, law'. I feel a great peace at my heart with this: I feel that with the prophets' way I can face the whole world: Their way was the way of perfect equality, the way of justice and piety, as the Lord says of the believers: "made them stick close to the command of self-restraint; and well were they entitled to it and worthy of it;" (48:26).

I take the chance here to call on the whole world, the world's philosophers, and all advocates of human rights to join arms to abolish the Veto Right: it is indeed the major mischief in the world; its arrogant spirit descends from the Romans; it is not a natural product of modernity. The Veto Right stunts the world's progress and it is a major hurdle in its way. It is an indication that the petty *taghoots* of the world are protected by the major *taghoot*. Is it conceivable that the advocates of human rights pass by that most enormous mischief, the worst violation of human rights, without campaigning for its removal? Are they not ashamed of claiming to be advocates of human rights and believers in democracy? The Veto Right, which is condoned by the whole world, is antithetical to democracy, utterly incompatible with democracy; it is against humankind itself, and it frustrates any attempt of

progress in the world. Why is it, one wonders, that those big powers see the straw in the eye of others, and do not see the trunk in their own eyes? But why should we ourselves keep silent, accepting this political situation as if it were for granted? I do realize that the whole world is like this at present, but it does not have to continue to be so.

No, Abdul-Jabbar, I am not rebellious against God or His Book; but when big fortunes in the Muslim World are spent on purchasing weapons, weapons whose producers know they do not threaten their interests, it is incumbent on me to speak. If this is what we take to be preparing to defeat our enemy; if this is what we take to be the right response to God's command: "Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power;" (8:60); then really we are mocking God's command, we show our ignorance of our enemy; and, above all, we are exposing our blindness to the way things go in this world. When the Americans were dismissed from Lebanon, it had no army and no government, and even its people were killing each other. But the Americans and the French were dismissed, and Israel withdrew from besieging Beirut. This was accomplished by this ethnically ravaged, disunited country. Somalia, too, was in a miserable condition, starving and naked, but it dismissed the Americans and the United Nations, without regular army, and with almost no weapons. Japan was also liberated without war, without even killing the Americans. This must show everyone that physical power no longer does any part but creating illusions.

One can learn further by looking at Iraq, a country that is much greater than either Lebanon or Somalia, but it is being subjected to inspection from home to home, not for any practical purpose, but to be humiliated. This happens just because Iraq has a government, a regular army, and sophisticated or half-sophisticated, weapons. Is not this a ridiculous hoax? It further shows how there is a system which is obsolete, but some people cling to it. Maybe this is too abstruse for us to comprehend, so let us think of something that is within our comprehension. When the second Gulf war raged, the Arabs forgot about Israel, and turned to fight Iraq! Was that a problem of weapons? No, of course! It was a problem of ideas, concepts and relationships among the Arabs themselves. Can we understand this? How we keep complaining about Israel's destructive arsenal, but when Iraq does succeed in having its weapons, we insist that it is Iraq's weaponry which should be destroyed, as if it poses a greater danger for us than Israel!

So, what dense darkness impedes our discerning all these issues? Do they not fall within the sphere of Islamic issues? If they are at the heart of Islamic issues, what prevents us from discussing them in earnest and in depth? There must be some preconceptions that prevent us from handling these issues; and what price that costs us, and how long precious time we waste!

Well, when you ask me: 'Are you upholding the annulling of 'jihad', an established Islamic duty, even when all its conditions are met?' I can say, thank God that Muslims begin to recognize that there are conditions for carrying out jihad; though they may dispute about the specific conditions. So let it be noted here that when God says: Let there be no compulsion in religion, He is putting very strict restrictions on jihad; He leaves a very narrow occasion for jihad. The above verse is stating that a difference in religion is no reason for attacking the other; it is

merely the fact that someone exercises compulsion in religion. The truth at present is that if one were to look for a people who meet the conditions for waging jihad against, he may find it is the Muslim World, where the conditions are met with more than anywhere else. More than any other part of the world do Muslims exercise compulsion; and more than any part of the world are Muslims ruled by *taghoots* , transgressors beyond all bounds, who rule by compulsion. But it seems that people are not anxious to see compulsion lifted, but may be to see more compulsion imposed.

The real thing about supporting religion is not by having stronger muscles, and more destructive weapons: it is rather by having better-guided minds, and by helping people lift the persecution and compulsion. So when you raise in my face the Qur'anic verse: "Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into the hearts of the enemies;" (8:60) with the implication that I am rebelling against God and His Scripture, do you not agree that if we do not work for having more horses to fight with, we are not disobeying God, as horses are things of the past? Now, from here we can go on to say that Muslims' clinging tightly to physical strength is blocking their understanding. When God says: Let there be no compulsion in religion, He is ruling out the use of force; He is neutralizing and excluding it in connection with winning people into the faith or driving some idea into their minds. Let me remind you of the fourth issue of your journal, *Current Islamic Issues*, for the year 1997, when you convened a seminar on the effect of time and place on the process of carrying out Islamic jurisprudence. In that issue, there were legal views put forth by distinguished scholars concerning, among other matters, the weight of a female witness's testimony, and the scholars put forth unconventional views in that connection: so should we say in that case that they were rebelling against God or His Book? And when scholars say that slavery, with all the legislations connected with it is abrogated, will they be contradicting God's commandments? The same may be said when scholars took up the legislation concerning a woman's conduct after her husband's death, and they had unconventional things to say in that connection.

But it is in fact in the political domain in the Muslim World that we need to put most of our legislative effort; we need to earnestly fathom all affairs related to rule and government. Our move from the middle ages to the modern age is not an abandonment of the Qur'an: it is with the Qur'an in our hands that we must cross over to the present. Therefore, it is not irrelevant that Muhammad Arkoun mocks, as you point out in Question 11, those who cite the Qur'an in supporting a view, for, as he says, by doing so, they stir all the problems of the move from the mythical era to the scientific era. This thing has to do with something that is often mentioned in the Qur'an, that people may be in a state when they are unable to benefit from their vision and hearing, that men can come to a state when they are no better than animals. The Qur'an says about a certain group of people, "if thou callest them to guidance, even then, will they never accept guidance;" (18:57) it says: "Shall I tell you of those who lost most in respect of their deeds? Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life, while they thought that they were acquiring good by their works;" (18:103-104) Do you see how present-day Muslims have slogans like: "Democracy is a heresy;" on posters, while they

accept to be ruled by *taghoots*, and crave to be themselves *taghoots*, to dictate to people what they should believe?

Therefore one may say that what Arkoun has said is not without basis. We, Muslims, have not yet comprehended the changes that have come over the world concerning the *taghoot*, and the *taghoot*-worship. People have denounced the *taghoot*, as Iqbal says, but they have not yet believed in Allah. This means that inside the developed countries, people no longer tolerate to be ruled by a *taghoot*, they have rid themselves of that; but it remains for them to help others get rid of their *taghoots*. The West does not wish to see this take place; it rather dreads to see the others denounce their *taghoots*.

Well, Abdul-Jabbar, that we are controlled by others does not happen without reason. Our comprehension has deteriorated to a pitiful degree, and it tempts other nations to deride us. Indeed, the others do not deal with us as rational people, but as mythical people: When they sell us weapons that are no longer of any use does that not prove that we still live in a mythical epoch? When one does not appreciate the value of persuading man, of teaching people what happened in the world, does it not show that such a person lives in a mythical epoch?

God's law is realized in the predominance of justice; not merely justice at the personal level, but at the social level. We need to see how man loses the ability of understanding. In the preface to one of Arkoun's books, *Islamic Thought: A Scientific Perspective*, Hashim Saleh, the translator, presents a certain research concerning the orthodox conception and the dogmatic mind-set. This is a good example of modern research that focuses on the condition of man when he loses the ability to comprehend and analyze. We need to understand the orthodox and dogmatic mind, for we are dealing, in the Muslim World, with people who adhere to what they inherited from their ancestors and think nothing of reality and history. A dogmatic mind is that of a person who, when the objective circumstances call for a change in attitude, he fails to make that change. And that is exactly what happens to us in the Muslim World. This dogmatic or orthodox mental attitude is what Muhammad Iqbal meant by the condition of people in the pre-scientific epoch, and what Malek Bennabi meant when he said that a man who is ignorant of what the twentieth century added to the human mind will only arouse derision whenever he opens his mouth to utter a word. It is very true, then, that the Muslim World is afflicted with cultural malaise, in the full sense of the word, but that does not mean it is incurable.

It is the mythical mentality that kills people in Algeria and Afghanistan. It is relevant to mention here that Sultan Abdul-Hamid once said to Jamal al-Din al-Afghani: "Why do not you go to Japan and work for the spread of Islam there?" And he retorted: "But what shall I reply if they say: 'Go back to your people, for they need Islam more than we do!'" Yes, the Japanese have adapted well to the modern world, while we still purchase the industrial world's outdated weapons; for even the atomic bomb is no longer of any use in modern life. It is worth our while to imagine how those who sell us weapons think of us; they actually think of us in the same way as a seller of blue beads thinks of the primitive tribesmen who buy his merchandise to use it as a talisman.

Khrushchev, leader of the Soviet Union in the sixties of last century, once said to President Nixon of the United States of that period: "Your grandchildren will be communists!" And Nixon retorted: "If they do, it will not by force, but through persuasion!" That is true, because America is open to us, to our persuasion; the open minds are there. It is only our ignorance that makes us believe it is not possible to get to the Americans except by force. So again we have to find ways of liberating the Muslim's mind, for he is intellectually crippled. He attaches no importance to thought, and it is our task to find the ways of entering his consciousness, and helping him enter the world of ideas. We do not at present have people who can address the world in a logical and scientific way! Can you imagine that? I do not find the words to express how deplorable our conditions are. We in fact do not dare to announce our denunciation of the idols; we fear the idols. O how deep and dark a chasm have we fallen in!

Even the Iranians, who have accomplished their miraculous revolution cannot export their popular and peaceful revolution outside their borders. No one could have been able to object to Iran's exporting its revolution in the peaceful way that the Iranians had won their victory over the Shah, facing the guns with flowers. The Iranians have not been able to advocate their way of winning victory, as if what they had accomplished were not unique, as if winning a victory in a peaceful way were a thing to be ashamed of! No, we must have the resolution and pride not to bow to the arrogant powers. When Iran is diffident about its great revolution, its foes will exploit that to charge Iran of supporting terrorism, or exporting terrorism. As things stand at the moment, neither does Iran speak out to bring its revolution to the attention of the world, nor do the others take the trouble to understand what the Iranians had achieved. It is a tragic thing how the Iranian revolution is shown to be: It is in reality a revolution of the people, a revolution of the intellect; it is also a revolution of the woman. Even the word revolution does not do justice to what happened, for the word revolution is a term that is foreign to us – we should really call it a revival of the prophets' action, a resurrection of the prophets' struggle. Let no one imagine that this unprecedented event will be forgotten. It is in fact a harbinger of the Islamic revolution.

Our failing to understand the Iranian revolution, a revolution in the prophets' tradition, proves that our mind-set is still a mythical miracle-oriented one. Many people view the Iranian event as peculiar to Iran and the Shiites, as if the Shiites are not human beings, while the Qur'an teaches us: "Ye are but men, of the men He hath created;" (5:18) laws that apply to the Iranians apply to all mankind.

How long will it take the Muslims to learn the meaning of the most honorable of martyrs (a reference to a tradition: The most nobly killed of martyrs … is that who stands for a tyrannical ruler to tell him the truth about his tyranny, and is put to death as a result)? How long will it take people to understand the Iranian event? They did not set fire to buildings and shops; they merely challenged the curfew, in perfect resolution. Who will teach people the struggle of the prophets, where one does not set fire, nor rob; where one is trusted not to hurt and is known to be safe.

Is it not justifiable for Arkoun to say here that those who cite a verse from the Qur'an are really stirring all the problems of the mythical era? Is it not justifiable for him to say that when some will cite here the Qur'an's saying: "It is not fitting

for an Apostle that he should have prisoners of war until he hath thoroughly subdued the land;" (8:67) to go ahead and kill prisoners of war? That which is stated in the above verse was once fair dealing, but is it still the right legislation? God's *shari'ah*, Divine law, has justice at its core, and whenever something nearer to justice comes into being, it has to supersede the previous legislation. Those who have enough learning and expertise must keep on the look out for what realizes more good for men to choose it as the right ruling; and even then, they must be alert to any facts that come to surface, and to see if that changes the ruling. Muslims will go on blundering until they understand the movement of history, that new things happen which were not there. I am sure that later generations will come up with better methods and techniques to solve problems like this without feeling that they are challenging God, His Book, and his Prophet, peace be upon him; instead of feeling that they are vitiating Allah's Scripture, they will feel that they are honoring it. They will feel great peace and they will feel they have broken the fetters that bind them.

As for the question about terminating resistance against the Zionists, I do not say we should stop it, but I say if there arises a way more beneficial and effective, less costly and securing more good, then we have to choose that which realizes what is good to our *ummah*, the Muslim nation, in general. It will be a great thing if Arabs and Muslims join arms in doing good, without anyone of them losing anything, and with everyone winning rather than losing. Why cannot they boycott the enemy, and anyone who allies with the enemy? Why cannot we for instance manipulate the siege against Libya? Why cannot we say that Libya's position is just and fair: it is only requesting that the two convicts should have trial in a neutral country? Why cannot we say that the siege on Libya must be stopped; that we challenge that siege. Measures like these work most effectively, over the head of all the big powers. But we still work under great illusion, a charm is petrifying us. Why this unbelievable stupor? Why are we unable to sort out what is possible from what is impossible? Am I mad? Maybe. But I find these things within our capacity, and our nations will accept willingly and with pleasure the price of resolutions like this. America tried often to besiege Iran, but it failed, as it could not have enough states rallying to the boycott. So why should we work for building an atomic bomb, when we have the Tigris and the Euphrates? Why should we think we would starve if we decided to do without the American or Canadian or European food and medicine? It is great nonsense that we are made to swallow! My mind cannot accept the Muslims' attitude to their enemies, so let people call me what they like. I do agree with Arkoun when he says that we still live in the age of myth and wonders. Why do not we choose to solve a problem in peaceful ways when it can be solved like that? Why do not we put to use our human resources and our faith? Why do we insist on the only way that our enemy wants us to use? Why did Iraq invade and occupy Kuwait rather than strike and destroy the Israeli reactor? The Israelis did not hesitate to strike the Iraqi reactor. Had Iraq bombarded the Israeli reactor, it would have had all the Arabs behind it. What is the use of those missiles if we do not use them for our benefit? Where are those who can think? Where are the thinkers? If just one country would rise to the level of the time, and think on the basis of the science now available to everybody, it would attract all the Arabs and Muslims around it. This is not to be achieved with the ridiculous weapons that are being used, weapons that keep us in the mythical past. It is rather by saying to the neighbor: Here is my country if you

wish to have it. A country which has risen to the scientific level of the world, and to the democratic consciousness of the world, cannot be ruled by a dictator.

I feel what Iqbal felt when he said:

Had my madness been potent enough I would have moved you!

by which he meant that had his madness been strong enough it would have been contracted by the others, but it is not. And I feel that there must be something lacking in me that I do not move other Muslims. There are things that we are unable to think about, but which, as long as we fail to take into consideration, we shall be, as Garoudi says, offering our enemy, on a gold dish, what he wants us to do.

A popular legend tells that a guardian had custody of an orphan's money; he managed it and submitted his account at intervals. One day, the orphan noticed an item in the accounts about shoes for the camels. So he inquired of the guardian: 'Do camels wear shoes, the same as horses?' And the guardian replied: 'Well, my son! If you are old enough to understand that camels do not wear shoes, then take custody of your money, for you are now a grown-up.' I recall this legend because the Muslim World has not become a grown-up. It still thinks that it needs horses to do jihad. We are still far behind the world in which we live! Why do not we think of the European Union? Its realization is an unprecedented event in the world. Europe did not unite by military invasions, for that kind of unification is something of the past. And now you find some Arabs begging to be members in that Union! The European Union did not happen as a result of mythical thinking; it happened with science and knowledge. But we do not understand that; we do not work for spreading science and knowledge. If we spent on spreading science and knowledge the amount that we spend on the purchase of weapons, we would be in a far better position. What an ironical situation we live! But who can really reveal the Islamic malaise? During the First World War, they used to call the Ottoman Empire 'the sick man of Europe'; and the war was waged for distributing the legacy of the sick man. So there you are! Do you sense how dense the darkness is in which we live? Do you see the demons and ghouls which torment us? Do you sense the charm we live in? To break out of this charm no war is needed, and no war can avail. All we need is more knowledge. But how can I transmit the knowledge about the modern world and about adapting to it? The Soviet Union did not fall because of the lack of weapons, but because of the lack of knowledge and understanding.

Maybe it is in order to mention here an anecdote, to shed some light on the difficulty of raising people to the desired level. In the mid-fifties of last century, I had a friend, a shari'ah (Islamic law) judge from an Arab country. We exchanged some kind of intellectual dialogue. But he startled me one day with a sudden question, when we were alone in the mosque. "What do you think, brother, of those unbelievers who claim that the earth orbits the sun? Cannot they see with their eyes that it is the sun that goes round us?" It was stunning, but I managed to control myself, and I said: "Well, can you expect unbelievers to have better minds?" I said that because I imagined the wilderness I had to carry him through to grasp the idea of the present world.

There is another anecdote, mentioned by Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406 A.D.), in his *Muqaddimah*, about a minister and his little son. The minister had to spend several years in prison, and he had his little son with him. The son had seen nothing of the outside world. Of animals, he only saw rats. One day, the minister was telling his son about his experiences in the outside world, and he had to mention the horse. The son naturally asked what a horse was like. So the minister started describing the horse: its size, head, ears, body, tail, etc. After listening to his father's long representation of the horse, the boy said, in all innocence: "Is it not like a rat, dad?" Every time the father described the horse, the child's response was the same: "Is it not like a rat, dad?" And he was right, for he had never seen a horse. And we often have to give up in despair and to respond to the ignorant inquirer: Yes, it is like a rat, son.

I may say now that Israel is a myth, a scarecrow, placed there to scare Arabs and Muslims, as long as they live in their myth and the age of wonders. Indeed, an idol has no strength, except in so far as people believe in it. A mythical faith is so tightly built, that it is the most difficult thing to pull apart or penetrate. If it were not so, if our way of understanding were not mythical, how can we explain that in the second Gulf war we forgot Israel and totally ignored it, and felt that the problems among the Arabs were much more urgent than the Israeli ghost? Indeed, the problems that keep Arabs and Muslims disunited are mythical: every party believes in physical strength, and that blocks our way to any understanding; it makes us incapable of seeing or hearing. When people are in that state, then to invade Kuwait is quite logical to their mind. Wherever we turn, we have to face the same reality: We need to understand how Arabs and Muslims can go on clinging to their mythical way of understanding. What Arkoun said about our clinging to myths is not different from Iqbal's saying that Islam chronologically belonged to the pre-scientific era, but it laid the basis for the scientific era. But we Muslims have not entered the world to which we chronologically belong. We have no sense of facts and figures, but our imagination is full of ghosts and myths.

When will someone come and diagnose our disease? Who can discover the germ which makes of us what we are? You are not the first to ask me about violence. Your question about violence is the longest, and so my answer is the longest one. Some people used to say: How can you believe in non-violence when you know that even when the Islamists in Algeria succeeded by a democratic vote, democracy was aborted there to prevent them from ruling; What else can they do but to resort to violence? And I reply: Why do not you remember Iran? The revolution did not succeed there with ballot boxes, but they succeeded by facing the soldiers with flowers. Can someone come up with a comparison and contrast between what happened in Algeria and what happened in Iran? Is the utmost we can come up with is to say that Iran's event may not be explained according to laws or science, that it was just a miracle? And you see what violence is doing to Algeria at present? While one saw what flowers did to the soldiers, not just to show them love, but to show that non-violence was mightier than violence. The Iranians did not go out to boast about what they had accomplished, but that is not enough. Jesus Christ once said: "Who of you would kindle a light and then place it under a cover? No, you should place it on high, so that all people may see it." The Iranians should have showed their non-violent way, like a light, on a high place, so that everyone might see it. But they put it under a cover. We need to look for it

in its dark niche, and to bring it out into light so that the ordinary person might perceive it. I have been quite put out that this creative, futuristic, scientific achievement should be ignored like that! Indeed, it should come out with all the necessary pictures and comments; it should be broadcast with all the multimedia it merits: no man or woman should be left ignorant of that event. Like all the great deeds of the Muslim World, the Iranian revolution remains neglected, since it is the acts of physical power that fascinate the Muslim World. Malek Bennabi meant this when he said: "The morbid adoration in the Muslim World for physical force has hindered its appreciation of knowledge and the power of ideas, that ideas are the real resource of people." He pointed out what happened to Germany, which lost all it had, as far as material things are concerned, but it had all its treasure of ideas, and so in no time it was able to reconstruct its material world. The Muslim World, on the other hand, has a barren intellect, and so it lives in the material stage, and has not yet entered the intellectual era.

So, when Mr. al-Rifa'ee asks me: Is Jawdat Sa'eed upholding the annulling of 'jihad', an established Islamic duty, even when all its conditions are met? I reply by reversing this question and I ask him: Will Mr. al-Rifa'ee start fighting if all things could be solved without fighting? What is the meaning of uprightness in the Qur'an? What is the meaning of democracy? Is it not that all parties agree not to solve political problems by violence? Democracy will not enter a country whose population believe in or legitimate the assuming of authority through violence. As I said above belief that is realized through compulsion is not belief, nor is disbelief that is realized through compulsion disbelief.

It is useful to note that the world of big powers, or, the evil powers according to Khomeini, cannot solve their problems through violence: this is a vital fact of the modern world, but the Muslim World seems not to understand that. The other fact is that nor can the world of the weaklings solve their problems with violence. For evidence one can just refer to the two Gulf wars: no benefits accrued through them, none whatsoever, for any of the disputing parties. It is only the big powers that reaped the gains of the war, in a most dishonest way. Can we learn the lesson then, and never carry out such belligerence, calling it jihad, and claiming that all the conditions for jihad have been met?

I may go from here to claim that though America cannot be conquered by war, it can be conquered by ideas. In the course of a discussion, someone asked about America, and I said: "America is saying: 'Convince me and possess me!'" But how can we convince America? Should we say: "See our leaders! Why not adopt their ways?" Anyone can see how Islam is reaching more and more people, despite all our unfavorable conditions; so why go out and discourage people from the way of Allah? Malek Bennabi, may his soul rest in peace, used to say: Water irrigates not by running uphill, but by running downhill. So if we occupy a petty place in the world, with no ideas, with no solutions for the world's problems; if it is the other world which gives the solutions, resorting to science, and not to myths and miracles, why should people listen to us?" As the situation stands at the moment, it is he who has better thought that can sway the world; the miracle that we seek is sound thought – not muscles and not missiles. It is man who will defeat the idols.

Let the *kharijites* be jubilant in their graves, seeing that the whole Muslim World has converted to their way; that the 'conditions for lawful jihad' of the other Muslims are no better than those of the *kharijites'*: Is it not enough that one believes that he is in the right and the other is in the wrong to fight him? Is it not on this basis that Ali bin Abu Taleb was assassinated? But it appears that we are still in need of more wars, the spilling of more blood and more pain to believe! It is history that teaches people the lesson: but some are so dull that they will not learn until the catastrophe hits them; while the brighter ones will learn through observing what befell the others; and most people are at present of the first category. If we go by the Qur'an, we find so many peoples perishing by not learning the lessons of history; on the other hand, it is just the people of Jonah that are described as having learned without having to undergo the same catastrophe that befell the others. Eventually, however, the accumulation of painful events will drive the lesson home: events like the two Gulf wars should have been enough, and I hope no third war should be necessary to learn. It is so because when the past history does not teach people, then its lessons go unheeded, and more disasters prove to be necessary. About that we have in the Qur'an: "Such is the chastisement of thy Lord when He chastises communities in the midst of their wrong: grievous, indeed, and severe is His chastisement." (11:102) "They will not believe in it until they see the grievous penalty;" (26:201)

Let me own here that the discourse of people like me is not at present compelling enough; we do not so far have the words equal to the topic; therefore, I should not blame those who do not respond; I should blame myself first of all. But many Muslims' minds are by now primed for the vital facts; they have matured through the painful experiences we have undergone.

Q.6: Jawdat Sa'eed confers on Muhammad Iqbal's thought such a distinguished status. So what is so original about Iqbal? In what way has he laid the bases for a new system? What is his impact on current Arab thought?

A.6: It is not easy to bring together what I have to say about Iqbal. What most attracted me to him is that he was firm in his belief, that he believed deeply, and it showed in his behavior. And besides his solid belief, he had a profound and extensive understanding of the current world, the understanding of an original philosopher. It always amazed me how the two sides thrived side by side in the same mind. As I felt the urgency of combining science and faith together in coming to terms with our dilemmas, I felt that Muhammad Iqbal had both in the highest degree, in a way that I could not find in any other person, and both aspects were solidly established in his character. He was well-informed about the Islamic heritage; he had a thorough knowledge there; and he was quite present, quite at home with what went on in the world, conversant in several languages. You do not often come across a man like that in the Muslim World. What we usually have in the Muslim World is a person specializing in Islamic heritage, but not knowledgeable about modernity, or vise versa; and that of course is our weakness. But Muhammad Iqbal well understood the importance of both sides. He was an original thinker about the science of *tawheed*, the Islamic faith (the modern theology that Arkoun very much harps on); he was an original *sufi*, mystic, who

knew what to take and what to leave; he was an original jurist, who had some ingenious views in the sphere of dealings. We do not find anyone to take up what Iqbal contributed, to substantiate and elaborate it. He was quite aware of the novelty of his ideas, and he was also aware that people did not understand him, that he was burning alone, like a candle. He felt that he had set the tone for a poet that did not yet pick up from where he left; he felt that it was a rare deer that he had left behind, and that the hunter who would catch that deer had not yet appeared. In brief, he felt that his ideas were for the future, that there was no Muslim yet who was ready to pay the price to buy the Joseph left behind by Iqbal. But he felt sure at the same time, as he said at the end of his collection, *The Book of Secrets and Symbols*, that what he sowed would produce some time later a field that would be splendid to observe.

As for his influence on modern Islamic though, it is quite little, particularly in the Arab World. All people understand is that he was a poet that praised Islam; he complained: they take me for one of the poets, and they tell me, 'Eulogize this man', 'Satirize this man'; they do not understand me. In this way we understand why Hamilton Jibb said of him in his book: *Modern Trends in Islam*: "He understood Islam in a new and unprecedented way, but his calls were cries in the wilderness, or blows in the ashes. There was no one to understand him or to respond to his calls."

One would come across quite a few who say they admire his praise of Islam; but all have reservations concerning him; all those responsible for the young caution their followers against him, saying that he had extreme *sufi* views, or unacceptable legal rulings. They dread his referring to history and experience in judging civilizations; they dread his attitude to *shari'ah*, the Divine law, when he says that the rulings of *shari'ah* may be reconsidered in the light of experience. In sum, his innovations have been submerged in ambiguity and skepticism. Most of those who claim to know something about him do not really understand him; they have not invested enough time to exploring his depth.

The world as he saw it was different from what others saw. He said: Our *ka'bah* (the holy cube of Mecca) is replete with idols; disbelief makes fun of our Islam; our sheikh has bet on Islam, favoring the idols; our mufti sells his fatwa for some money; our preacher has his sight fixed at the idols' home; they have wasted the purity of Mecca. Iqbal said that there was need for a fresh Islamic theory which recognized the continuous creation: taking note of the world's tireless evolution and expansion. And he noted that one of the basic principles of the Qur'an was that communities were brought to account collectively in this world. He took the verse of the Qur'an, 'To every people is a term,' (7:34) to be an example of historical judgments, that in its aphoristic brevity it indicated the possibility of studying human groups scientifically, as organisms. The attention given to history in the Qur'an as a source of knowledge was not casual or in passing. It really laid the basis for very deep historical study.

He connects *tawheed*, the unity of God, to the unity of the whole world. It is the basis for a scientific principle that directs believers to show obedience to God, rather than to thrones and crowns.

He also discusses the stagnation that cripples Islamic thought. He cites the controversy concerning the 'oldness' of the Qur'an; he also mentions Sufism, mysticism, how it blocked people's visions of Islam as a social constitution. He notes how the traditional scholars were alarmed at the fall of Baghdad, apprehensive that it would lead to social dissolution; therefore they focused all their efforts on one thing: to maintain a uniform social life that applied to all classes of people; they most jealously denied any form of reformation in legislation. That precaution was designed to protect the social system, which was their first concern. And they had some justification there, for a rigid system would resist dissolution. They failed to see, however, as our modern scholars do, that the destiny of a people did not depend on a system as it depended on the caliber and solidity of individuals; that a community which was dominated by disciplinarian ways would result in the individual's completely dissolving; he would pick up all the social values around him, but he would lose his soul. From this it transpires that the unrealistic veneration of past history is not the remedy for a people's dissolution. The only panacea for dissolution is to have individuals with strong individuality; only individuals like this will have in their character the depth of life, and it is individuals like that who are capable of announcing unconventional views, which will prove that the inherited legacy is not at all a taboo to contradict. (The above is adapted from chapters five and six of Iqbal's *Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam*.) It may be noted that what we have here is a quite unconventional way of discussion. I reflected long on such passages, and I detected a shaking up of our inherited legacy, of the things that the ancestors thought and then assumed that what they had thought was revealed by God; but I realized that that legacy was not inviolable.

We have not absorbed Muhammad Iqbal's thought; to absorb and digest it requires that one dedicates a long time to that; his intellectual stature is not to be taken lightly. We need to devote to him many debates and studies. Only then can we reap the fruit of his ideas; elaborate and expand them. I am sure that future generations will be awakened to his contributions, that his innovative notions will win the respect and acceptance they deserve. There will be a lot of studies on him and his achievements. His is one of the great minds that dedicated themselves to the service of Islam. May God grace him with His favor. He really uplifted my life, and illuminated my mind with the profundity of his faith and the vastness of his learning.

Q. 7: Globalization seems to be a new mask worn by the Western civilization. So how can we guard our cultural identity? How can we preserve our independent character so that we do not get dissolved in this new call to globalization?

A. 7: Before I take up this question seven, let me make it clear again that my answers are not final, nor comprehensive. On the other hand, one should not be appalled by the complexity of terms, nor by some peripheral and minor aspects drawn by some individuals from great ideas to serve mean purposes. Indeed, great ideas and knowledge do eventually much good to man. It maybe true what a certain Muslim scholar had in mind when he said: "We sought to acquire knowledge for other than God, but it would not be for other than God." Now, as

for globalization, it must lead to God, Lord of all mankind; no one but Allah is the Lord of all people. No nation can monopolize globalization, for it is a process that is bound to happen. The prophets all come from God; they all direct men to God, and their messages are in perfect harmony. At the same time, we all descend from Adam, and Adam was created from dust. No man is to be raised over any other except in so far as he works for the good of mankind, all mankind. In the end, it is only what is good for people that will stay and resist perdition (ref. to the Qur'an, 13:17)

For eons of time men did not know of the other peoples in their scattered habitats. And then things changed; people began to know of the existence of other people, contemporaries and old. Now, there is no niche on the earth but is known, and no small group of people but is known. Man is now working for exploring the possibility of intelligent life on other planets. It may be noted that no matter how narrow and self-centered the purpose of the person or persons who first made a great discovery was, that discovery was eventually put in the service of all mankind, a global good. That is true for instance of the domesticating of animals, the discovery of agriculture and the discovery of writing. Writing was originally confined to small groups of people; pre-Islam Arabs were not commonly literate, and they did not have books. The introduction of writing on earth is the real beginning of history, and the starting point for turning to account human intellectual faculty. Even the internet was first devised by the Pentagon to facilitate contact and the exchange of data among its personnel, but soon it was global, and for the good of all mankind, in a way that no one can now monopolize it, or exploit it to the exclusion of others. All this is true of globalization: those who wish that globalization will allot some benefits to some people can wish what they like, but we should rise to the level of not letting others exploit us.

One of the greatest things propounded and taught by the prophets is that man cannot be exploited or subdued except with his own consent, by just sticking to his ignorance. Once he is enlightened, once he has acquired knowledge, no one can exploit him or subjugate him. Hence, the main purpose of the prophets' mission is to spread knowledge, and not to keep it monopolized by a limited group. The needed techniques are now globally available; information is now accessible everywhere. It is not the others who now hold back knowledge or information; it is indeed we who dread the influx of information; we dread to be told what is happening in the world. In this we are gravely mistaken, for our only salvation is through knowledge and through reading, reading without any limits. So you see that things are there for us to put to our use, but it is Muslims who hold back from entering the realm of knowledge.

Can you really perceive the intensity of darkness and disorientation we suffer from? We seek to protect ourselves by secluding ourselves from the world. Knowledge itself spreads freely everywhere, and has entered every home, but we still dread it and refuse to admit it. It is we ourselves that choose to keep ourselves and to keep our people in the dark.

The solution is not to be scared of knowledge and thought, and not to be scared of disbelief. We seem at present to take an active intellect to be not unlike a disbelieving mind; that is why we dread thinking in the same way that we dread

disbelief, while disbelief is no more than the lack of knowledge and sound thinking. We see things to be the opposite of what they are, all because of our ignorance. Jesus Christ said: "You will know the truth, and the truth will liberate you." Knowledge is power, and it is liberation; knowledge is global, and we have to enter that realm. No one will be the object of exploitation but the ignorant, so when will the Muslim World learn not to be scared of knowledge, and of being present in the world? And especially now, where can one hide himself from what is taking place; the world is a small village now, so where can we hide ourselves? Do we insist on mimicking the ostrich which is said to hide its head in the sand to protect itself from its enemies? But that is not the way to safety. The way is by boldly entering the realm of knowledge, by being witnesses of what goes on in the world. I know that there was a time when the Muslim scholars encountered new knowledge by turning their backs to it, but that is just not possible in the face of the explosion of knowledge that surrounds us. I do admit that I do not have the eloquence that is necessary for such topics, for exposing the idols that block our way to acquiring knowledge. Knowledge protects itself from corruption; it is as Malek Bennabi once said: "When science accepts nothing short of truth, it fulfils the conditions of morality." Knowledge does not tolerate errors; it will work tirelessly until mistakes are corrected. No one should suppose that science is an adversary to ethics: Ethics grows as a result of more science, it thrives on knowledge and experience. But when science was separated from ethics, ethics became chains and a hurdle in the way. The truth is that science demonstrates the outcome of behavior, good or bad, and when morality is divorced from science, it will be an aping of other people's behavior, the way of clinging fast to what has lost its justification, and has become something of the past. The behavior of the ignorant will backfire, causing him to be an utter loser; backwardness will have its toll; it will come in the form of a scourge from God, driving men to see and understand, whether they like it or not. And once something becomes a science it will have become universal. This applies to Islam. When we understand Islam as a science, it will be for all nations. That is why both Islam and science emerged concomitantly, and people must believe in both in the same way.

Therefore, those who scare us of science and knowledge with a view to protecting our belief, are really supporting polytheism, without meaning to. Abraham, peace be upon him, teaches us not to be scared; he said, as the Qur'an tells us: "How should I fear the beings ye associate with God, when ye fear not to give partners to God without any warrant having been given to you? It is those who believe and confuse not their beliefs with wrong – that are truly in security, for they are on right guidance." (6:81-82). We had better reflect on the above verses: a believer should be distinguished for good guidance. I call on believers and all men to realize that to hinder knowledge from reaching men is really supporting darkness, disbelief and persecution. As we read in a tradition of the Prophet's, peace be upon him: "Injustice comes back on its perpetrators as darkness on the Day of Judgment."

It is relevant here to contrast the behavior of prophets and that of their peoples. The prophets endeavored to spread knowledge and light; the antagonistic peoples dreaded knowledge and light. Our plight at present is seen in that those who have science and knowledge would like to hold them back, and are apprehensive of their spread to other parts of the world; they endeavor to retard the spread of

science and knowledge. This is what happens when those who have science and knowledge are unbelievers; a believer, in contrast, loves, as the prophets did, to give light and knowledge. But let us not worry, for it is God's will that light will spread, as one sees in several verses of the Qur'an; indeed God's light will reach every spot in the world. "Their intention is to extinguish God's Light, by blowing with their mouths; but God will complete the revelation of His Light, even though the unbelievers may detest it;" (61:8) "Fain would they extinguish God's Light with their mouths, but God will not allow but that His Light should be perfected, even though the unbelievers may detest;" (9:32).

My affirmation that light will spread everywhere in the world is not just because I believe in the unseen, but because I see its manifestation in the concrete world; I see its manifestation in God's Signs in the near and far regions of the world, and in the world of souls. The truth has come to surface, and even if we fail to embrace it, God will cause other human beings to embrace the truth and support it; the Qur'an will have its supporters, with or without us. There will be those, as the Qur'an tells us (5:54) who love God, as He loves them, who love God's creatures, and protect them, for they are God's family; they will be nearer to God than we are.

Let it be said also that democracy is nearer to God and His Apostle than the conditions of Muslims at present; let it be said that it is not Muslims who uphold democracy and denounce of *taghoots* (trespassers beyond all bounds, tyrants); it is not they who have brought that to the world, nor are they capable even after democracy has taken root of adopting it at present. It is other nations who bask in the blessing of democracy, and it is others who have the power to dominate us. So how long will it take us to open our eyes; how long will there be locks on our minds? How long shall we go on having scales over our eyes, and shackles that detain us from moving? But, let me repeat, God's light is coming!

Have I answered your question? I hope at least in part.

Q. 8: One main tenet in your writings is a call to free ourselves of father veneration, raising our ancestors above their human place and accepting their way as infallible. You assert that this idealization of ancestors blocks the way to any new approach to things. The question here is: are you calling to dissociation with the heritage of the past? If so, do you not agree that any advance in dissociation with the past is illusive, without any roots?

A. 8: Thank you, Mr. al-Rifa'ee. A good question helps engender a good answer; but can I guarantee a good answer? Even if it is not, I am sure questions like yours and answers like mine will help questions and answers to be better and more refined and sophisticated in the future. Future answers will help people get rid of physical suffering and mental anxiety.

It seems that I have, in the course of my previous questions, taken care of your question. But in view of the importance of the topic, and the major part veneration of the fathers has in impeding our progress, there is no harm in taking it up, at the

risk of some repetition. Indeed, these issues have not been discussed enough, and it will be a long time before justice has been done to them.

No, I do not call to giving up the Islamic heritage, nor indeed the heritage of mankind right from the first man that existed on earth, so many millennia before men could read and write. The first men who succeeded in domesticating animals and started agriculture laid the basis for all later development. It is a grave mistake to dismiss them from memory, for in that case we shall have to reproduce the whole process of man's development across his long history. And progress will not stop. Man can learn to intervene in the production of plants; there is nothing indeed to prevent him from learning to artificially produce what plants produce, and so have unlimited quantities of the same fruits and vegetables at his disposal, and with the minimum cost. In the same way as men have outlived the era when horses, mules and donkeys were the means of transport to the era of modern transportation, in the same way as man achieved that which no one would have fancied to be possible just a few generations back, men will, a few generations hence, achieve things that we cannot imagine; for God, as the Qur'an tells us: "adds to creation as He pleases;" (35:1). The verse leaves the door open, and no one may claim it should be closed.

To be content with what the ancestors left behind is now suicidal! Must we accept their way of transferring authority? It was an accepted practice in the past to transfer rule with treachery and assassination, and people reveled at it. It happened because it was the way people understood God's '*sunan*, laws', but things have changed since. And even now, we still misunderstand the Qur'an when it says: "O God! Lord of Power, Thou givest power to whom Thou pleasest, and Thou strippest off power from who Thou pleasest; Thou enduest with honor whom Thou pleasest, and Thou bringest low whom Thou pleaesest;" (3:26) but we see how God has enabled some people, who know about His laws and act on them, to themselves give power to whom they please, and strip off power from whoever they please.

When we discuss the fathers, we need to determine where they stand. It is right to say for instance that they did not have the knowledge that is now available, they soon fell back for the transfer of authority on treachery, assassination, and crooked ways; all kinds of savagery were justified in the way of capturing the position of ruler. I do realize that this does no go far in replying to your question; but there will be some scholars who can clarify this fogginess. No matter how long it will take the Muslim World to see things for what they are, light will come; what is good for mankind will survive all the froth. But we really must accept the best of the ancestors' deeds and forgive them their ill deeds, as a certain verse of the Qur'an directs us (46:15). We need to understand fully that history does not stop, neither for our forefathers, nor for any other people. There was a time when men slept in the cave and died in their struggle with carnivorous animals; indeed, we have a trace of that in the Qur'an, when Jacob declares to his sons that he is worried that if they take Joseph, the wolf might devour him while they are busy racing.

It will not do to let our love and veneration for the ancestors completely block our expanding our understanding; the Qur'an itself reports how ancestors can be a

great impediment to development: "They say: 'Nay! We shall follow the ways of our fathers.' What! Even though their fathers were void of wisdom and guidance?" (2:170) The Prophet, peace be upon him, warned one of his companions that it was quite difficult to be a just witness when a dear kin was involved. It is a common thing in judicial procedures that individuals may not be witnesses when a close relative is involved. Indeed, people are mostly quite biased when something concerns a person who is from their own ethnic group or their town or their religion. It is not such a strange thing that all the opponents of prophets always referred to their fathers in rejecting the prophets' call. Although the Qur'an condemns those who follow their fathers blindly, Muslims take this to apply to all other peoples but not themselves. The problem of father idealization is a most trying one, and it is a huge stumbling block for Muslims; they seem to lose all balance when it comes to going beyond the limits of their fathers; hence the confusion of right and wrong. We are commanded by the Qur'an: "O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin;" (4:135) which is a most stern command. The way to deal with the fathers is to measure their behavior and convictions against the laws of history: history will not give respite to those who ignore its laws. It must be a firm conviction of ours that what is good for mankind will be given survival.

I have lived through this fascination for the fathers, so have all of us; but it varies from one to one. It may be noted that as time passes, some of that fascination is wearing away, for the veneration had reached such a dimension that it made Muslims incapable of seeking better solutions for their problems. Let me repeat that the same forefathers that we glorify had fought among themselves, had failed to stand for truth, had let falsehood dominate, and had resurrected pre-Islamic ways. But why has all this lingered until today? Why cannot we go beyond the negative aspects in the legacy of the fathers? Why cannot we emulate the perceptiveness of their minds, something that other nations, people who we brand as unbelievers, achieved in doing, and then went beyond the legacy of the ancients? Take for instance the European Union. It is a peaceful, scientific, egalitarian, system; it has been designed and executed with great care; and it is certainly nearer to the commands of God and His Messenger, peace be upon him, and all the wise people in the world, than our disharmony, hostility, and disunity. Are we quite incapable of understanding? Can we not see how our veneration for the fathers impedes our discerning any solutions for our chronic ills? Nonetheless, it may be noted that the severe blows of sectarian struggle in the Muslim World tend to be less excessive as time passes, and they are gradually opening our minds to be more receptive, and our senses to be more sensitive. It was Iqbal who noticed that the world, except for us, got over the complex of the servile attitude to the fathers; Muslims still challenge the whole world, and challenge the facts of history, insisting that God has not, and will not, create any humans like them.

I wonder how those who will come later will think of writings like mine, and how they will judge us! History is indeed a very strict judge! But let us pray to the Exalted Lord to make us respond to the events of history! We have already received enough blows, very severe blows; enough to make anyone learn the lesson.

Q. 9: Do you agree with the now prevalent assumption that the Muslim mind is in a crisis? If that is so, how extensive is this phenomenon, and what are its manifestations? How can we overcome this crisis?

A. 9: There can be no doubt about the crisis in comprehension and consciousness in the Muslim World. It is so glaring that anyone can see it. It was first perceived by the others when they spoke of the Ottoman Empire as 'the sick man of Europe', but it often happens that the afflicted are the last to awake to their affliction.

We know that somebody is sick when we notice his pale color, his unsteady hand, his lack of energy: all such symptoms are true of the Muslim World. Indeed, even the least educated will speak vehemently, or write mournful poems, about this *ummah*, Muslim nation. Who can fail to notice how Muslims ruin their own life? How Muslims receive ill treatment at the hand of Muslims? How Muslims can join hands with confirmed enemies against their brethren? Worse, we call all that acts of devotion that bring us closer to God. Is not our condition similar to that of the unbelievers described in this verse of the Qur'an: "The unbelievers spend their wealth to hinder men from the path of God, and so will they continue to spend; but in the end they will have only regret and sighs; at length they will be overcome;" (8:36)

So that is the easy part of the question. The interesting part is of course the latter part: How can we deal with this crisis?

As in other questions, there is often overlap in answers. I find that some of the previous questions are relevant here. Let me remind you of your question number four about the two sources of knowledge: the Qur'an and world history. Yes, Abdul-Jabbar; you express very truly my stance concerning history, as an instructor: yes, it is in fact the sole instructor who is all patience despite the inattention of most humans. It is like the computer, which never loses its temper, but never fails to give the person in error the feedback: Wrong answer – try again! No matter how often the user repeats his mistake, the computer is never furious, but never forgiving a mistake.

History is what builds up understanding. We have so little understanding because we do have no sense of history. I sometimes say that a person who does not know history is not trustworthy as a thinker about human affairs. The Qur'an itself says that history will be its witness. It says that in verses like: 'So see what was the end of those who made mischief,' (7:103) 'Then see what was the end of those who indulged in sin and crime' (7:84) 'But see what was the end of those who did wrong,' (10:39). In the same way as one needs a witness in the law court to prove his case, the Qur'an refers to history to be its witness: "Soon will We show them Our Signs in the furthest regions of the earth, and in their won souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth;" (41:53) I also quoted Muhammad Iqbal when he said that history was a source of knowledge.

When you ask: How can we get over the crisis which we undergo? The answer is that we get over it by viewing those who went through crises like ours or worse

than ours, and how they got out of them. The West went through a long series of wars, local, regional, and international; its nations did each other a lot of mischief, and caused each other great suffering. The Christians who read in their Bible: Love your enemy, inflicted on each other all kinds of scourge. But they succeeded in going beyond those crises; so how did they succeed? In this there is a lesson for him who has ears and eyes and a heart.

We can learn the lesson of Europe – by finding the way to integrating and concerting our interests, without any party losing anything; with all sides winning; in a scientific and peaceful way; unless we do that, saving time and pain – we shall have to learn the lesson after we have had a surfeit of torture and loss. History will teach each one of us, and will not fail to have its lesson driven home, but it is by means of suffering that history teaches. "Such is the penalty of thy Lord when he penalizes communities in the midst of their wrong: grievous, indeed, and severe is His penalty;" (11:102). So let us be attentive to what is happening in Europe. It is something new and unprecedented in the history of the world. Let me mention again that when something has happened once, it can happen again; it can be a law and a scientific truth: people can adopt it and use it to account.

We need to probe the European event in all its details, from beginning to end. It is taking place under our very nose, so why cannot we see and hear? Does it not concern us how people succeed when we cannot? Let us think of Germany, which stands to lose much in the short run; let us think how the borders are being opened, how the monetary union has become a fact. No messenger has descended from heaven to teach them all this, nor do they wait for the clergy to tell them what to do: it is all the work of science, the lessons of history; sociologists and statisticians have their say, and what they say is respected and applied. It is not so with us, where science is despised and physical power is glorified. What Europe is realizing is more momentous than the detonation of the atomic bomb, although the atomic bomb did have its indirect share in what happened. We should be smarter and not wait until the atomic bomb forces us to learn their lesson.

I think, Mr. al-Rifa'ee that I can sympathize with the darkness and bewilderment that you must feel; but did you think that you will find light and contentment by addressing me? Knowing history is really a source of light: history grants gratis the experience that others had paid for! By appealing to history with open eyes and ears, you get the thing ready-made. Jalal Nouri, a Turkish social writer from the late Ottoman period once wrote: "Once we learn the ABC of knowledge, no mountains and no rivers will detain our progress; our lost rights will return to our children and grand children with interest." Well, let this be our solace in these dark days, when we have to pay dearly [for the purchase of weapons,] but our money evaporates into air, and money is the solid base of our life; and we see the orphans and widows in pitiful tears, and the zealous young men butting at a solid wall [by resorting to violence,] as they see the grown-ups putting their heads into the sand.

I do not say I have solved any problems, nor that I have arrived at any conclusions. All I have done is to raise questions and look right and left, to see if it is possible to get out of the crisis. And so the answer is yes, there is a way out.

God did hint that man will get over mischief and the spilling of blood (ref. to the Qur'an, 2:30); and no one should say it is far off; how fast it will come will indeed surprise us.

Q. 10: What is your reading of the present Arab cultural scene? What books or projects do you rate as interesting and not just repetitive?

A. 10: I am not pessimistic about the current intellectual Arab scene, despite the snail pace at which it develops. There is the shift from glorifying or condemning politicians to looking inside, and this is a step ahead. During the early days of the Palestinian crisis someone asked Amin al-Husaini, the mufti of the time, how he read the situation, and he answered: "Now it is for the sword to talk, so let the pen be silent." And the sword did talk; there have been noise, uproar, coups, wars, the exchange of accusations; the intellectual has in the meanwhile been silent or when he spoke, he spoke in inaudible whispers. All this has happened, and a stage has passed. But things are not like that now. After the Gulf wars, people no longer charge the politicians with the responsibility for what has happened; the intellectual is thinking along new lines – he now thinks of the social evolution. Before that, at the 1967 defeat, there were some voices, though too low, but it was a kind of proclamation, when they said that the defeat was not just military, but intellectual as well. So history is making its impact; culture is not confined to reformers like al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and their disciples; it is now a general phenomenon. There are now no charismatic figures that pose as heaven-guided, or the quintessence of change – it is rather a trend now. An example is the establishment of the Center for Arab Unity Studies, a non-political, non-governmental, organization: it is an intellectual organization that attracts thinkers and researchers; and it has published some noteworthy studies, and has held serious research seminars. Another distinguished organization is the International Institute of Islamic Thought. It certainly represents an advance, a good accomplishment. It now produces young enlightened researchers with good brains. Affiliated to it is also a college for Islamic-social studies, which trains scholars of both sexes. It keeps track of what is taking place in the Muslim world.

No matter how slow these organizations are, and despite all their drawbacks, they are taking root, and gaining in resolution and confidence; and they are finding better response; two or three generations have now served them. On the other hand the audio-visual media and the T.V. channels now compete in stimulating thinkers and researchers to discuss interesting issues; people watch and hear with interest. It is indeed a splendid thing to observe how new ideas keep emerging as a result of the discussions. Competition is leading to variegating the topics and styles in political, social and economic affairs; and things are going apace, in presentation, direction, and reception. It would be an excellent thing if someone followed up all that, taking down the facts and making the necessary statistics to bring to our notice what developments are indicated by the statistics. The idea of democracy, though very little showing up in the discussions, is having some more roots. When so much is said about the other, when plurality of opinions and freedom of opinion are hailed, when these and associated topics are raised, they cannot but add up to something positive. Even censorship is not possible now in

the old sense – the authorities have no hold on the spread of ideas, as information is being exchanged at faster and faster rate.

Another thrilling aspect to watch is the increase of book fairs in all Arab metropolises, the wider circulations of publications, the exchange of visits of scholars and lecturers, the development of Arab art, and the ever more creative and ingenious serialized drama. I do realize how serious the gaps are in all the above; but things are picking speed, with sure steps: there is definitely no way back. One may conclude that things will come together and conglomerate to end up in real changes. And once communication and contacts are established among us, they will be unlikely to regress into older situations. And all these things happen without anybody's planning for them; it is circumstances that bring them about. It just is not possible for things to stay as they were, for the evolution is going at great speed. Of course there will be some who see nothing but repetitive, tedious events that are of no interest at all, even in the political arena.

Here is an example of a seemingly minor thing. After a recent election in Algeria, one of the ministers declared: "It is true that we have lost the election, but we have won democracy." Of course we have not won democracy, but such statements are new, and they have their significance. Similarly, Salman bin Abdul-Aziz, the Saudi minister of defense, declared recently in Washington that nations had their desires that could not long be ignored. These words are not just a repetition of old stuff, and they count. The point is that all such declarations indicate that development is taking place. One also hears a Jordanian politician say: "Why is it that if we listen to our people it is extremism and retrogression, while if they listen to their people it is a human value, and it indicates their progressiveness and marching upwards?" So it is not one or a few declarations like these, although they often get lost in the uproar and chaotic noise of indictments and counter indictments. The fact is that the Arab world, and the whole world are quite shaken as a result of the two Gulf wars; everyone has had to review their calculations, whether oppressors or oppressed.

No one but has to adapt to history. You can see how nations are going through rebirth, on a global scale, in Africa, Asia, and South America; but like any delivery, this cannot happen without labor.

Q. 11: Professor Muhammad Arkoun insists that there is a need for a fresh theology for approaching Islam and religion in general, and emphasizes that this is still hardly touched upon. Arkoun mocks those who cite the Qur'an in the course of a debate – according to him, any such attempt would stir all the problems of moving from a mythical to a scientific age. So how would you rate this stance of Arkoun's?

A. 11: You puzzle me, Abdul-Jabbar! What occurred to you to ask me about Arkoun! I never had Arkoun feature prominently in my writings, nor is he high in my priorities. I admit of course that I read him intently; I worked hard to get to the deepest recesses of his mind, to fathom what he was after. The first time I came across his name was when I read an article in a UNESCO journal, *Diogenes*,

entitled 'Islam and Development,' and I found that there was something about his writing which called for thought. He was different from Malek Bennabi – he in fact mocked him, and depicted his ideas and conceptions as void of any modernity. This did not put me out, as I knew that contemporaries were often incapable of doing justice to each other – his contempt for Bennabi detracted nothing of the latter's worth in my eyes. At the same time Arkoun is not talking nonsense; he is in fact intensely concerned about the welfare of Muslims. It now seems to me that Arkoun's insistence on a new theology could have been an incentive to me to think again about the concept of '*tawheed*, unity of God' as being an econo-sociopolitical issue rather than a metaphysical one.

It is not that this thinker said the above; but it was pressing on his mind; and I sensed the truthfulness and honesty of his endeavors. The way *tawheed* was handled by Muslim scholars did not do justice to the very high place assigned to *tawheed* and polytheism in the Qur'an. It was a central issue in the accounts about all prophets, but we somehow, most unaccountably, pass it by. That the Qur'an assigns so much importance to belief, disbelief and hypocrisy should have awakened us to the impact of such concepts on the life of a community. Not even today do we seem to appreciate this aspect, and that is what makes me say that what the prophets taught has not yet descended to the earth, that is, it has not yet taken its place in people's worldview. But it will come to be appreciated by and by; people will discover it as they have discovered the laws of matter, though they have not so far given enough time to the laws of man, nor have they learned how to activate his great potential. They certainly have not seen in man what Iqbal saw in him, an organ of the Divine will. This reminds me of a curious thing about Arkoun, that he never mentions Iqbal, not once (as far as I have seen, and I have read much, with all dedication, trying to get to the depth of his terminology and intellectual tools.) It honors Arkoun that he laid his hand on the necessity of a new theology; and by this I understand the necessity of correcting our conception of God. It is a mistake that we do not go to God's creation to know more about Him, and the Qur'an does warn that people may hold mistaken conceptions about God that will have harmful effect on their lives: "By this thought of yours which ye did entertain concerning your Lord, hath brought you to destruction, and now have ye become of those utterly lost!" (41:23) "moved by wrong suspicions of God – suspicions due to ignorance;" (3:154). What Muslims need is to know God through His laws, for at present Muslims do not possess a guiding light, after they have regressed to pre-Islamic ignorance. They have lost sight of the message of the prophets.

What the prophets promulgated is, as far as I see it, a social revolution. This idea has so settled in my mind that it makes me appreciate their message as being worthy of the Almighty and All-knowing Lord; this has been His will, to guide His servants through the messengers He picked. But little do we know about God, and little do we know about the message of the prophets. But we shall rediscover their message – and when we do we shall be amazed to see how early in the human history did the prophets teach that which is worthy of attributing to the Creator of the universe. How difficult people find it to comprehend and accept the above fact is manifested in the Qur'an's reporting the people opposed to Prophet Muhammad as saying: "Has he made the gods all into one God? Truly this is a wonderful thing!" (38:5) One equally learns from the prophets, something that has

been as difficult to accept as the above principle, that human beings are equal. How alien this has been to the minds of people is dramatically shown in Pharaoh's attitude to Moses' message, as reported in the Qur'an: "Am I not better than this Moses, who is a contemptible wretch and can scarcely express himself clearly?" (43:52) In another verse we have: "Similarly, no apostle came to the peoples before them, but they said of him, in like manner, 'a sorcerer, or one possessed!' " (51:52)

That we have not got to the core of the prophets' message is not unlike when men for many centuries took the earth to be at the center with the sun orbiting it. As I see it, we should regard the social, political, and economic problems in light of three verses of the Qur'an:

1. "Say: … come to common terms as between us and you;" (3:64) at the social level;
2. "Serve God, and eschew the *taghoot*, i.e. the trespasser, the tyrant," (16:36) at the political level; and
3. "Seest thou one who denies the Judgment to come? Then such is the man who repulses the orphan with harshness, and encourages not the feeding of the indigent;" (107:1-3) at the economic level.

One thing that Arkoun addressed in earnest is the mythical conception of people; People with the mythical conception think of God as not dealing with humankind on the basis of '*sunan*, laws'; although God tells us in the Qur'an: "Are they but looking for the way the ancients were dealt with? But no change wilt thou find in God's way of dealing: no turning off wilt thou find in God's way of dealing;" (35:43). God has willed that laws should be consistent and constant. To the degree that man is ignorant of the laws of the world, he is dominated by the phenomena of the universe, and to the degree that he discovers the laws he dominates the phenomena of the universe. We of course like to think that we have rid ourselves of the dominance of wonders, but if we look well we shall discover that we still find our mind more contented with dealing with life on the basis of wonders, and not on the basis of '*sunan*, laws', and that is why we are still afflicted with lots of catastrophes.

But when Arkoun insists on separating religion from the state, he is contradicting himself and ruining his call for a new theology. Indeed, a new theology will turn religion into a science. He puts himself quite in a quandary when he clings to two incompatible principles. I will not go so far as to deny that Arkoun sincerely wished to find the common ground between science and religion. In his last book, *A Window on Islam*, one senses his coming closer to the necessity of setting a harmony between science and religion on a basis of sound knowledge. He quotes Habermas, the German philosopher, who stresses the need for reviving the covenant with God, as propounded by the prophets; says Habermas: "When someone raises a protest against treachery, he does that not just in his own name, but in the name of other humans. Every human is potentially an ally in the struggle against treachery, including the one who betrays himself. The principle of honesty is something that is incomprehensible without a comprehensive pact against treachery."

While Arkoun urges us to follow the West in its separating religion from state, the prophets worked for a harmony between state and religion. This confusion and this separation, a reflection really of the Western way, do not give satisfaction even to Arkoun himself: that is why you find him at other times calling for a more careful study which establishes harmony between religion and state and between religion and politics. His stance is rather similar to that of uneducated Muslims, who have learned from experience that politics was based on treason and dishonesty, on opportunism and wrangling; while religion is based on honesty, uprightness, kindness and selflessness – that the two are just incompatible.

The prophets, however, introduced politics that is characterized with honesty, uprightness and kindness; their truthful and honest policy subdued treacherous politics. This is what is lacking in the world now; politics stands for dishonesty, from the United Nations to the smallest Muslim state. It is this form of politics which the Prophet had in mind when he warned that people crave to be appointed in political positions, though a person so stationed will regret it on the Day of Judgment. In another tradition, the Prophet, peace be upon him, distinguishes between a person who does all he can to get a political job, and another who is urged to accept such position: the former, as the Prophet says, will be left to his means, while the latter will be provided with support from God. It seems at present that humankind is moving slowly towards honesty and equality, and towards adhering to non-violence, even when one has to uphold it unilaterally, should the other side decline to accept this attitude, but without any compromise concerning honesty. It is opting for the prophets' principle rather than the way of treachery.

Arkoun is all for modernity; but modernity is undergoing an overhaul. It now reexamining its bases; hence the emergence of new trends like postmodernism. That Arkoun quotes Habermas, as shown above, is an indication that, as Jesus Christ had predicted, the Kingdom of God is coming. Actually, the social system cannot operate effectively and smoothly with dishonesty and privileges. A system that works on the basis of dishonesty and privileges will, before long, have cracks and begin to decay. We saw what happened in the two Gulf wars; and unless we regain the principle of equality (the word of common terms, in Qur'anic terms), the decadence will be worse and more severe. And this present situation of dishonesty cannot be put right with further dishonesty. Man has been created to find his contentment in nothing but uprightness, no matter how far men are lured by the devils. So our only hope is in spreading once again the message of the prophets; since there will be no more prophets, their task is now to be carried by those 'who teach just dealing with mankind' (the Qur'an, 3:21); it is for these to bear the heavy yoke, the trust which, as the Qur'an tells us (33:72,) was too heavy for the heavens, the earth, and the mountains; but it was borne by man. We should be sure that man, as hinted by God in His discourse with the angels (2:30,) will be able to rid himself of mischief and the spilling of blood. For man will discover, sooner or later, that any mischief he does, will backfire and it is he who will suffer from the results. If anyone is in doubt about how far man has advanced towards fulfilling God's plan for him, let him remember the cavemen and the men of today.

Another thing about Arkoun, he is not as Muslims take him to be, a defector from Islam or a lackey of the West. Indeed, he is in the difficult position of having to fight on two fronts, confronting the orientalists on the one side, and his own people, the Muslims, on the other. He says for instance that it is a mistake to assert that Islam is different from Christianity in that Jesus Christ taught that you render to Caesar what is Caesar's and you render to God what is God's, while in Islam there is no diving line between the religious and the mundane. This, as Arkoun says, is just an illusion that resulted from inter-religion disputes. In brief, Arkoun has something to add, and it will not do to dismiss it in contempt. He actually puts us face to face with a new world. The principle to adopt in dealing with him is, as with anyone else, to apply the Qur'anic principle, to "accept the best of their deeds and pass by their ill deeds;" (46:16). So let us be tolerant, especially with people like Arkoun, who has had to confront critics on all sides. Let us learn a lesson told by Abdul-Qaher al-Jailani concerning a controversial mystic: "Al-Hallaj did slipped, for there was no one at his time to show him the right way; but I am here to show the way to whoever slips." I hope that we can learn from this. When Arkoun says that any person who quote the Qur'an to prove a point is really raising all the problems of traversing from the age of wonders to the scientific age, this assertion of his is not without a real justification. Indeed, even Ali bin Abu Taleb had to warn people that when one quotes the Qur'an he has to bear in mind that the Qur'anic discourse has multiple meanings. When God sends down a Sign, as He says in the Qur'an (2:26) 'by it he causes many to stray, and many he leads into the right path.' Therefore, the Qur'an, just as a book, is not enough for guidance. This is the simple fact. It is the Qur'an itself that tells us what to refer to to understand it: the signs of the world around us, and within our souls. The facts of the world will put right our understanding of the Qur'an. Otherwise, the Qur'an will be there for every party to find in it what it likes. Is it not the less truthful party, the opponents of Ali, who held the Qur'an, stuck and raised high on the tip of spears? From that time until today, we are using verses of the Qur'an to spite our adversaries. But you will often find a truthful piece of Islamic writing without one verse of the Qur'an, without one tradition of the Prophet's, peace be upon him, and perhaps without one quotation from the great scholars of the past. A writer may be more convincing by citing the realities of history and modern or old events.

The Qur'an itself does not address us by uttering its verses; it is invariably quoted by men, and men can quote it rightly or wrongly. Let me remind you here of the Messenger's, peace be upon him, saying that the Jews and Christians, have the Scriptures in their hands, but benefit nothing by their truths. And this is exactly true of us. But things will not be as they are for long. We shall learn to be guided by the Qur'an, having for reference the signs of the world around us and the inner world of our souls. When Muslims do that, they will put a stop to their misinterpretations and misquotations.

Let me wind up with Arkoun's last words in his book, *A Critique of the Arab-Muslim Mind*: "It is right to conclude our search with something deeper, to help us understand the great potency of the Qur'anic phenomenon, potency that went on unabated over the centuries… It is there, though we are unable at the moment to lay our hands on its particular place in the Qur'an itself; the same as it is with the words of Jesus Christ … the fact remains that there is that immense power of the

Qur'an which gave birth the Qur'anic phenomenon, in a particular place, and not anywhere else: these are vital questions that are waiting for our answer, and our answer must be different from the orientalists'… We call for the establishment of a new science, broader than what we find in the field; and when I campaign for this, I feel that it contributes actively to a rejuvenation of human sciences, through the Islamic model. This new discipline, which I suggest to be called 'applied Islamics', I am dedicated to see established and launched." Again I am not quite sure that I have given a satisfactory evaluation of Arkoun.

Q. 12: What do you think of the modern trends concerning sacred texts [the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions], according to which any attempt to arrive at truth through examining a text must bring up all the multiplicity of readings: in the sense that no general truth can really be gleaned from a text; that even the attempts at legislation on the basis of texts, and through analyzing texts, is bound to be elusive and illusive, no matter how ardently its adherents claim to be sincere and objective. Is not such position tantamount to assuming that the truth of the sacred text itself is relative, or even nonexistent?

A. 12: As you see, Abdul-Jabbar, wherever we turn, we are invariably brought back to how to deal with the text. The text is a series of symbols, vocal and light symbols to which we assign certain significance. While without the symbols we cannot retain any experience we come by, without the experience the text becomes worthless. It is so because the text is just a vehicle of sense; there is a reciprocal relation between text and sense: no experience can be conveyed from one mind to another without the text. I know I repeat this and keep repeating it; I keep reminding those who cling solely to the text: It is the Author of the text itself Who says refer to the facts of the world. You cannot get to the heart of meaning with the text alone.

I may repeat an example that illustrates how our knowledge of the world conditions our understanding of the Qur'an. The two words, 'the sky' and 'the earth' are frequently used in the Qur'an, but what occurs to our mind when we come across 'sky' and 'earth' is not what occurred to the mind to the first audience of the Qur'an. This teaches us to always refer to the basic place, the real world in which we live. This is pointed to by both science and by God. Indeed, even the ancient Arabs used to say the moon is the moon; it is we who have different concepts of it. I may add here that when you hear or read the word 'fire' it does not burn your hand; it is just a symbol, a symbol that we utter. If we can comprehend this and digest it well, it will give us peace and comfort. We can tell anybody who makes any claim: If the signs of the world around us or the inner world of our souls testifies in your favor, then what you say is accepted, for the time being – until something emerges that is nearer to matching with the facts of the real world. It is as the Qur'an challenges a certain people who assert that they will neither believe in the present Scripture, nor in what was revealed to Moses: "Then bring ye a Book from God, which is a better guide than either of them, that I may follow it! Do, if ye are truthful:" (28:49).

The idea of a pair (here the text and the real world) is a basic one in life, as the Qur'an tells us: "And of every thing We have created pairs, that ye may receive instruction;" (51:49). There is no proliferation in life without pairs. That is something that we can readily comprehend. But the Lord establishes the same connection between the text and the real world: "Then, by the Lord of heavens and earth, this is the very truth, as much as the fact that ye can speak intelligently to each other;" (51:23). It helps to analyze how we speak, what happens when we utter words; to remember the participants in the process of speaking: the speaker, the hearer, the topic, the words that express the sense, the vehicle of the sense, without which nothing can be conveyed. It must be clear to us that no sense may be conveyed without reference to reality. The classical example is always the sun, when men accepted for numberless centuries the illusion about its going round us, until the facts became known to them.

Praise be to God

Jawdat Sa'eed. 3 March, 1998